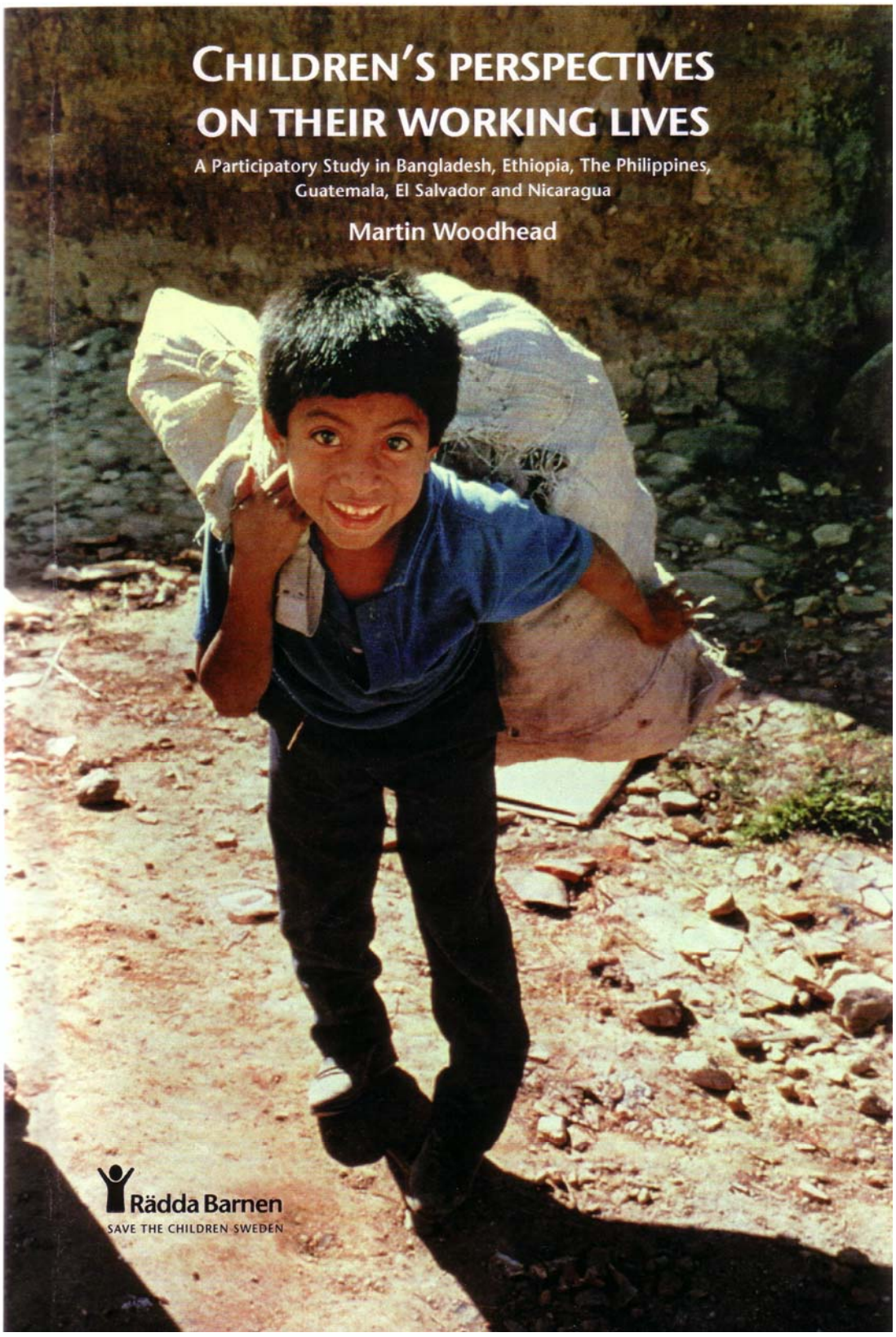
CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES
ON THEIR WORKING LIVES
A Participatory Study in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines,
Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua
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A REPORT FROM THE RADDA BARNEN PROJECT

CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR WORKING LIVES

A Participatory Study in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua

Martin Woodhead

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Preface

Since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, Radda Barnen has been working towards ensuring that the rights stated in the Convention become a reality for all children. Special attention is afforded to Article 3, which emphasises that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. This implies a child-centered approach that brings children's perceptions of their lives and needs and their suggestions for solutions into programme and advocacy work. Radda Barnen also has long experience of programmes for working children - and of the complexity of the issues involved.

In order to stimulate a child-centered approach on child work issues, Radda Barnen, in 1996, decided to undertake a major project on the situation of working children. This report comprises one of three interlinked parts of this project.
The objectives of the project include:

- to identify areas of consensus and division among practitioners and experts on child work issues;
- to raise public awareness regarding the impact of work on children's lives;
- to produce knowledge that can be used by Radda Barnen and others for advocacy and in order to improve policies and programmes relating to working children;

- to develop and test participatory research methods for use in investigations with children in different cultural settings.

This report on children's perspectives on their working lives is one of few in the world that asks working children directly what they think about their work, how they feel about school and what their hopes and aspirations are for the future. As such it is an opportune piece of work, especially in the light of the debate surrounding child work. Many people involved in this debate have not talked to working children and assume that they have nothing of relevance to say. This study proves that working boys and girls are quite capable of forming rational and sensible opinions that are worth hearing.

Although the values and ideas expressed in this report reflect the views of the study coordinator and are not necessarily the views of Radda Barnen, we would particularly like to stress the study's emphasis on working children's own perspectives on their lives.

The other reports of the Radda Barnen project comprise a survey of organisations and experts about their opinions regarding crucial issues as regards child work and a study of five different programmes conducted for and by working children.

It is our hope that these studies will contribute to a better understanding of the

realities of working children, thereby improving programme and advocacy work and ensuring that these activities are always carried out in the best interests of the child.

Johan Stanggren
Director
International Programme Department
Stockholm, May 1998

Contents

Introduction

This report describes a participatory study of children's perspectives on their working lives. It was carried out during 1996/1997 in collaboration with local fieldworkers in four regions of the world, (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines, and three Central American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua). Over 300 children and young people participated in the study, mainly aged 10-14 years. They voiced the perspective of children working in very diverse circumstances in both urban and rural settings.

The study aims to inform international and national policy-making on child work issues, and to provide the basis for more effective projects of prevention, intervention and support for working children. The starting-point was the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), particularly the goal of promoting the 'best interests' of children by protecting them from exploitative and harmful work (article 32). The study sought evidence on this issue from working children themselves, engaged in a wide range of occupations, in contrasting regions of the world.

This study is part of a long overdue trend to take account of children's own perspectives on child-work issues. A distinctive feature is the inclusion of a wide range of rural and urban occupations, as experienced by children. Some of these young people are working in situations that would be widely recognised as hazardous and exploitative. The situation of others may be less extreme on the 'continuum' of harm as White (1996) has described it. Yet others are in occupations where the hazards and potential for exploitation may be less visible than for more highly publicised examples. By drawing attention to all these children's circumstances, this study encourages the plight of specific vulnerable groups to be understood in a broader context of issues and concerns faced by working children, and indeed all the world's children.

Another distinctive feature of this study is that local fieldworkers all used the same framework of activities *(The Children's Perspectives Protocol)* as the starting point for groupwork with children, which they adapted to local circumstances as appropriate. The protocol provides some basis of comparability across diverse situations, while still retaining some qualities of in-depth work, including extensive quotations from individual children.

One of the most encouraging developments in child policy work in recent years has been the inclusion of children themselves, offering the perspective of child workers at conferences, through the media etc. This study is designed to complement these efforts to involve children and young people in the 'child labour debate', by extending the range of participants able to contribute. Through qualitative research, a voice is offered to children who would otherwise not be heard - for example those children who live in remote circumstances, or work in occupations that less often receive 'headline' attention. The study also aims to give a mouthpiece to children who have no contact with projects for working children,

or movements of working children. Without research like the study reported here, these children's experiences would pass unnoticed; their stories would not be told.

The aim of this report is to summarise the diverse perspectives of more than 300 children on a series of key themes that affect their working lives. Strenuous efforts were made to listen to children and record what they said 'with an open mind'. Even so, it is in the nature of social research that this report has been shaped by the way the study was carried out: (i) by the choice of occupations studied, by the way groups were convened, by the questions asked, and by the activities conducted; (ii) by the way local fieldworkers summarised the group discussions, interpreted the participants' contributions and translated their words; (iii) by the way I, as coordinator of the study, have attempted to distil and integrate a mass of material; and (iv) by the way you, the reader, interpret the pages that follow, linking what you read to your involvement with and beliefs about the issue of children's work. I hope this report provokes continuing dialogue amongst young people as well as adults about how best to promote the best interests of present and future generations of working children.

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due to all those who have contributed to this project, especially to the young people who gave their time, thoughts and experiences to the groups. I am grateful to those who led the local studies and carried out the field work: Ruby Noble and Fatema Multany (Bangladesh); Cecilia Oebanda, Roland Pacis and Vio Montano (The Philippines); Konjit Kefetew and Tibebu Bogale (Ethiopia); Maria Eughenie Vilareal and Carlos Chapeton (Guatemala); Carlos King and Silvia de Fernandez (El Salvador); and Dharma Carrasquilla (Nicaragua). I thank Georgina Barnes and Molly Tyler-Childs for preparing summary information, Bronwen Sharp and Chris Golding for secretarial help, and Peter Barnes for press cuttings. I thank Sam Punch de Torrez, Rachel Marcus, and others who commented on earlier drafts of this report, along with all those with whom I have discussed these issues during the past two years. I am grateful to Jo Boyden, Birgitta Ling, Bill Myers and David Tolfree for introducing me to this topic; and to Vibeke Jorgensen and others at Radda Barnen for seeing the project through to completion. Finally, I thank my family and my Open University colleagues for their support during the course of this study.

Highlights of the study

This participatory study was initiated by Radda Barnen to inform debate about the effects of work on child development - from children's point of view.

- Local fieldworkers carried out the study in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines, and the Central American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. A specially designed *Children's Perspectives Protocol* structured group activities about all aspects of children's working lives.

- 318 children participated in 49 groups during 1996/1997. Most were aged 10-14 years. Their occupations included lead mining, fireworks manufacture, weaving, brick-chipping, domestic work, market work, porters, street vending, shoeshine, fishing and associated trades, plantation work and various other types of agricultural work.

- A few children talked about being forced to work; other children felt they had made a choice to work. Most children had been initiated into helping their families from an early age - they felt work was a normal and necessary part of childhood, within the constraints of their circumstances. For some, work is not just an economic necessity; it is at the core of their identity.

- Many children are struggling to reconcile competing pressures - to work, to attend school and to support their family. Virtually all the children contribute some or all of their income to the family purse. One of the reasons for working is to help pay the direct and indirect costs of going to school.

- Working children describe the hardships and hazards associated with their work. But much of their concern is not so much with the work itself as with the way they are treated. They recognise their vulnerability to those (mainly in the adult world) who exploit, bully, ridicule and physically abuse them. Being treated badly has a major influence on working children's low self-esteem.

- Children do not view their 'work' in wholly negative terms, any more than they view 'school' in wholly positive terms. Many groups disliked aspects of school, such as the harsh punishments they often receive from teachers. When asked what makes them feel good about themselves, groups referred as frequently to 'work' as 'school' themes.

- 77% of the children in this study believe that 'going to work and attending school' is the best option in their present circumstances. 11% believe 'work only' is the best option. 12% favour 'school only'.

- Local variations in attitudes to work and school were linked to work situation and prospects for schooling. In Bangladesh and Ethiopia, about 25% children favoured 'work only' but few favoured 'school only'. In The Philippines and especially in Central America, few children favoured 'work only' but about 20%

favoured 'school only'. Despite these variations, two thirds or more of the children in each study site felt combining 'work and school' was the only feasible option.

- Children were asked what their reactions would be to a new law preventing work for children under the age of fifteen. Only 28% of groups would accept or welcome new regulations. 65% of groups said they would defy the law, evade regulations, or work 'underground'.

- Children's working lives are strongly shaped by gender. More boys' groups report parental expectations that they work to earn money. They more often work independently and have more control over their earnings. Girls often face a triple burden, of work, school and chores, but they report less often of having control over their earnings. Many girls' groups describe their vulnerability to harassment, physical and sexual abuse in their work. Domestic workers, street traders and sex workers described many incidents.

- Working children tend to attach higher status to their own work compared to other children's occupations - an indication of positive self-esteem. The exceptions included some girls' groups that gave their own occupation a lower ranking than others. In Bangladesh, brickchippers and domestic workers see garment manufacturing as offering them better conditions and prospects. Ironically, this is one of the occupations that international action has targeted for elimination of child labour.

- Effective, context-appropriate interventions demand that children's perspectives are taken into account. Children are the principal stakeholders in the 'child labour debate'. This study demonstrates that children are active in their attempts to make sense of their circumstances. They are perceptive about the problems that face them and constructive about potential solutions. They have a unique understanding of the ways work affects their lives, and the ways their situation could be improved.

Chapter 1: Why listen to working children?

Ten year old Russell works as a porter in a Dhaka market. He's already looking for business by 8 am each morning, and works through until 7 or 8 each evening, with just a short break to go home for lunch. He grew up in rural Bangladesh until he was seven, but his family fell on hard times, and were forced to look for work in the city. He got as far as Grade 3 in the village school. But now his father is sick and unable to work much, so school is out of the question for Russell:

'If I stop working today and go to school, who will feed my family? It would mean earning and eating less because I would have to divide my time."

Since his family moved to the city, Russell has tried all kinds of jobs - as assistant to a shopkeeper, doing menial jobs in a garment factory, and washing dishes in a hotel. He thinks being a porter is the best job for someone his age:

`A porter is safe even if people accuse me of stealing and beat me. There are days when I can also earn a lot."

***

In a Guatemalan village, twelve year old Yarnilet spends 6 hours a day making firecrackers in a small workshop near her house:

`I work because I want to... I want to help my parents. They work a lot but the money is not enough. I've got six brothers and sisters and the money doesn't stretch for all of us, so I have to help."

Making fireworks isn't the only kind of work Yamilet has to do:

'1 also help my mother with housework. I help her go to the mill to grind corn. I help her prepare meals, wash dishes and take care of my two little brothers who are still very small and can't fend for themselves."

When she's not making fireworks or doing domestic chores, Yamilet is working hard at school, for four hours every morning. Earning money is essential to help pay for her schooling. -

'I get paid for the number of firecrackers I make... I give all the money to my mother and she buys me the things I need for school.'

She's hoping one day she can give up making fireworks and get a better job. Meanwhile her greatest concern is that one day there might be an accident:

`I haven't had any accidents but a schoolfriend had the fireworks explode on him - his clothing caught fire and he was burnt all over... I got very scared. I don't want to be scarred for life.'

***

Fourteen year old Armand is from The Philippines. He makes his living gathering Tahong shells from the sea bed. He often has to dive down five metres to get good shells:

"Sometimes my ears hurt because o f diving, and I get nosebleeds from all the water. Sometimes I get cut by the shells or by other sharp things lying on the sea floor. It can be very cold especially in winter."

Despite these hardships, Armand doesn't mind the work. Although he makes money to help his family and pay for school, he also works for the fun o f it:

"I work to be with my friends - to be 'in' with the other kids. Working young means developing your bones and body into becoming an adult."

When he's not diving, Armand helps out when the fishing boats come in, sorting and loading the fish onto a truck. He doesn't work every day because he's still in full time school, trying to complete Grade 6. He's already dropped-out o f school twice. The first time was because his family couldn't cover the costs. The second time was because of the punishments from his teacher. He hadn't submitted his class assignment so his teacher made him run round the classroom without clothes on. Even so, Armand wants to go through to High School, hoping one day to become a policeman.

Child labour and working children

Russell, Yamilet and Armand are just three out of three hundred children who talked about their working lives during the course of this study. In many ways their lives are very different - in where they live, in the work they do, in their family circumstances, school attendance and future prospects. What they share in common is that their work puts them at risk of physical injury, abuse or exploitation. Their work is `child labour'. Efforts to combat child labour throughout the world have increased in intensity during the past decade, (e.g. Bequele and Boyden, 1988; Fyfe, 1989; Myers, 1991; Marcus and Harper, 1996; Unicef, 1997). Article 32 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) offers the most powerful (near universally agreed) instrument to regulate child labour. During 1997, major international meetings in Amsterdam and Oslo debated the most effective strategies, and during 1998 the ILO is expect to propose a new Convention designed specifically to `Target the Intolerable' (ILO, 1996).

Russell, Yamilet and Armand are amongst millions of working children and young people throughout the world whose lives will be profoundly affected by interventions and regulations that follow in the wake of the current debate about how best to combat child labour. They are the subject of the debate and the targets of intervention. The question is - should they also be part of the process?

- What part should working children play in the child labour debate?
- Do working children have a role to play in shaping interventions to combat child labour?

- What is the best way for working children to participate?
- How can working children's voices be heard?

Children certainly have something to say, and some of the things they say may come as a surprise, as the words of Russell, Yamilet and Armand above illustrate. One reaction is that they are too young to have much to contribute, too immature and vulnerable to know what is in their best interests. In this study, we explore ways of listening to working children's perspectives, to ensure their voice does make an effective contribution to shaping their future.

Child labour in context

The goal of eliminating grossly exploitative and hazardous situations is widely welcomed. But one limitation of the debate so far has been a tendency to concentrate on particular situations either because of their visibility (e.g. street children); the obvious dangers attached to the work (e.g. involving chemicals); the themes that resonate with European social history (e.g. children in mines); the involvement of western commercial interests (e.g. carpet weaving, garment manufacturing), or western tourism (e.g. child prostitution). Until recently, less attention has been given to much larger but less visible groups, notably domestic workers and agricultural workers (Nieuwenhuys, 1994), not forgetting the work that is done by children within the confines of their own homes (Ennew, 1992). Another limitation of the debate has been the failure always to clarify whose interests are being protected. In a few well-publicised cases, interventions appear to have misjudged or ignored working children's interests, as in the case of Bangladesh garment workers thrown out of factories in order to satisfy consumer pressures for childfree products (White, 1996). The debate is distorted further when efforts to eliminate the most hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour spill over into more general proposals to exclude children from working at all. For example, implementation of a minimum working age, as envisaged in the UN Convention could be double-edged, eliminating harmful child work situations but at the same time denying children the possibility to participate in developmentally positive economic activities. In these ways, well-intentioned intervention on behalf of children can neglect the hazards faced by some children, undermine the position of others, and arbitrarily limit the choices of many more.

These areas of confusion and controversy are frequently compounded by failure
to distinguish a range of levels of intervention (from local projects with individual children to international conventions on children's rights) and failure to distinguish a range of time-frames for intervention (from the immediacy of today's work with working children to the longer term provisions for future generations of children). For instance, it is one thing for the international community to set a long term goal of freeing childhood from child labour, through the UN Convention or the proposed ILO Convention. It is quite another thing to translate that vision into actions that deny today's children access to work that is fundamental to their livelihood and may be a core part of their identity. The same mismatch applies to the goal of displacing work for school in the lives of the world's children.

The vision of universal primary education confirmed at the Jomtien conference in 1990 is seen by many as a global challenge for The Millennium. But accepting the challenge does not mean that today's children will necessarily be better off in school rather than work, especially while school is often mediocre, costly to families and of uncertain benefit to children's future prospects (Little et al., 1994; Lockheed and Verspoor, 1996).

Cutting across these dilemmas is the fundamental issue of deciding what is in children's best interests. What counts for quality in child development, for all the world's children? What standards should be set, and how can those standards best be applied? And who is best able to answer these questions - international agencies; child development experts; local communities? Most important, what part should children play in deciding what is in their best interests? How far should we listen to what the children say? This study is based on the conviction that children's participation is fundamental, and not just as a point of principle. Listening a little more to children is the starting point for understanding the problem of children's work more fully and intervening more effectively.

The case for taking children's perspectives into account is part of a wider argument about the way policy-makers think about child labour, and set standards that inform intervention. At risk of oversimplification, two approaches can be contrasted:

- One approach emphasises the universality of childhood as a distinctive phase of human life. It relies on a combination of scientific knowledge about features of psychological development presumed to be shared by all children, and international agreement about the importance of recognising and respecting their fundamental needs and rights, for care and protection, learning and education. This approach also emphasises principles of justice and equality.

- A second approach emphasises the relativity of childhood, the diversity of children's lives, shaped by geography, wealth and poverty, social organisation, family patterns, and economic opportunities. This approach emphasises the way multiple stakeholders shape the experience of childhood according to cultural beliefs and practices. Historical as well as cultural relativity is acknowledged, with expectations of childhood subject to transformation as a result of modernisation, urbanisation and education. While children have fundamental rights and needs, these can be expressed in diverse ways according to context.

International debate and policy-making about child labour is generally framed in terms of the first, universalist approach. The emphasis is on reaching agreement on universal principles of children's rights, child development and child welfare; and on applying these principles to children who work, whatever their circumstances. The problem is twofold. First, general principles are abstractions that do not translate directly into everyday realities. Second, some so-called universal principles are often interpreted as specific cultural prescriptions for a quality childhood. This is evident in The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 32 is framed in terms of protecting children's development:

"States Parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development"
(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 32)

Work is presented as an external hazard that is likely to harm a process of 'development' that is assumed to be universal. The possibility of alternative goals of development is not acknowledged; nor is the possibility that working might in some circumstances be a core part of developing. Note that school has a very different status. Article 28 of the UN Convention asserts children's right to education, and assumes that schooling will be beneficial. Education is so much a feature of children's rights that it is to be made compulsory.

Child development and children's lives

In Article 32, protecting children's development appears unproblematic. A close look at scientific knowledge suggests it is not nearly so straightforward. Textbook accounts of child development are based mainly on studies carried out by Western developmental psychologists working within the context of modem Western childhoods (Woodhead, 1996; 1997; 1998). One indicator of the cultural partiality of 'scientific' knowledge about children is the selectivity of textbook coverage. 'Play', 'learning' and 'schooling' are major topics. References to 'work' or 'labour' are rare, and mainly ask about potential negative effects of part-time work by adolescents in Europe and North America (McKechnie et al., 1995; Steinberg et al., 1993). Preoccupied as they are with childhoods confined within families, nurseries and schools, child development experts neglect the significance of work activities for children's initiation into skills, roles and personal identity, as contexts that can promote development, as well as harm development.

Excluding work from textbook childhoods cannot be justified even within the context of European and North American societies, where many more children work than are officially recognised (McKechnie et al., 1996), and virtually all children are (at the very least) required to undertake some domestic chores (Morrow, 1994). In global terms, excluding work from studies of child development is absurd, given that according to Unicef estimates, at least 190,000,000 children aged ten to fourteen years are working; 75% of them are working the equivalent of six days a week (Unicef, 1997).

The consequence of expert myopia is profound, especially because of the status attached to scientific knowledge that purports to describe children's universal nature. Particular cultural constructions of childhood become 'naturalised', masquerading as scientific knowledge about children's 'normal' development and their 'universal' needs (Burman, 1996; Woodhead, 1990; 1998). These cultural images of development now regulate childhoods throughout the world:

"As the twentieth century has progressed... highly selective, stereotyped perceptions

of childhood... have been exported from the industrial world to the South... It has been the explicit goal of children's rights specialists to crystallize in international law a universal system of rights for the child based on these norms of childhood" (Boyden, 1990, p 191).

While children in the most hazardous and exploitative circumstances are pathologised by terms like 'stolen childhood', the majority of the world's working children are rendered invisible, as living outside the definition of childhood, at least for this part of their lives. Rarely is explicit recognition given that the childhoods of which working children are said to have been deprived is a relatively recent cultural arrangement for young humanity, and in terms of the long term evolution of humanity, an exception to the rule. To confront this possibility does not detract from efforts to make progress in protecting children from exploitative and hazardous work. What it does invite is a more reflective awareness of the broader socio-historical contexts in which children work and develop. Working childhoods may in one time and place be judged a normal and natural part of growing-up, but in another time and place be judged as potentially harmful to development. Seeking working children's own perspectives not only renders their experiences of childhood more visible. It draws attention to the way these hidden assumptions shape public understanding of the subject.

Children as stakeholders in child development

To make progress on the issue of children and work, it is essential to reconcile universal principles and aspirations with an appreciation of the realities of children's lives. A first step is to acknowledge that the multi-dimensional concept of `child development' that Article 32 seeks to protect is neither preordained nor unproblematic. It is as much culturally constructed as it is biologically prescribed. Part of the process of implementing Article 32 requires elaborating how 'development' can be promoted in ways that are sustainable and sensitive to local socioeconomic and cultural contexts. In some respects this can be seen as a technical issue, about how to translate general principles to local situations. But at root it is also about the ideological stance taken to working children - how far the task is seen as about rescue and rehabilitation to a preconceived model of what childhood should be like, or as about supporting and empowering children and communities towards locally meaningful futures. In a parallel Radda Barnen study, David Tolfree has elaborated the philosophical approaches taken by projects for working children in Bangladesh, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Peru and Senegal (Tolfree, 1998).

Planning context-appropriate, creative solutions to the problems that face today's working children requires recognition of the competing pressures and priorities for child development, especially in contexts of rapid social change which demand constant reappraisal of what is in children's best interests, for present and future generations. It also acknowledges multiple stakeholders in the child work debate, each with distinctive beliefs and goals for childhood. Finally, it recognises that children are themselves the principal stakeholders, contributing to the process

of defining their own version of 'development' and taking what steps they can to improve their well-being and prospects, in their everyday struggle to survive, learn, and develop a sense of self-respect. A first step in ensuring their self-respect is for the adult world to respect their experiences, concerns, and aspirations.

Children as social actors

Just as the child-work debate is framed in terms of unstated assumptions about children's development, there are also problems in the way 'hazard' or 'harm' are conceptualised, for example in Article 32 of the UN Convention and most recently in the proposed new ILO Convention, designed to "Target the Intolerable" (ILO, 1996). Successful implementation of these Conventions demands establishing criteria for deciding what kinds of work are exploitative, hazardous and harmful. One approach, based on distinguishing 'child work' from 'child labour' has been challenged as too vague, too general and ultimately circular. An alternative approach places types of work on a continuum, with the most harmful and intolerable at one end, and the least harmful and most tolerable (possibly even beneficial) at the other end (White, 1996). This approach has potential, provided the continuum is recognised as multi-dimensional, with potential harm separately assessed for each aspect of work (e.g. physical demands, potential hazards, environmental quality, relationship to the employer, economic exploitation etc.).

The problem is that 'harm' suggests a very direct effect of work on children's wellbeing. For physical trauma and injury this may be appropriate, but much of the debate is not about physical harm. It is about psychological harm to the child's ...mental, spiritual, moral or social development'. For these psychological aspects of development, a model of causality derived from the physical and biological sciences is much less appropriate. Whether young people are affected positively or negatively by their work depends on their personal vulnerability. It is mediated by the social and cultural context of their work, especially the value placed on their economic activity and the expectations for their development and social adjustment. With the possible exception of extreme cases of forced or bonded labour, children are not simply passive victims adversely affected by their work. They are social actors, trying to make sense of their physical and social world, negotiating with parents and peers, employers and customers, and making the best of the oppressive and difficult circumstances in which they find themselves. They shape their working life as well as being shaped by it. _Work does not simply affect young people. It is part of their activity and it becomes part of their identity (Woodhead, 1998).

Children as participants in their present and their future

Taking account of children's perspectives is not an alternative to conventional evaluation research, which may demonstrate long term effects that children do not recognise. For example, young people working with hazardous chemicals may be oblivious to the harm that is being done to their health. But in other respects children may be acutely aware of the effect their work is having upon them. Their

subjective experience of the benefits or hazards of work may not be the same as the perspectives of an outsider. This is especially true for psycho-social aspects of development, where young people's perceptions are a key indicator of their self-esteem. Their feelings about work, about school and about core social relationships that support or undermine their dignity and sense of security are vital indicators of hazard and harm. While an outside observer may focus on what seems to be the immediate impact of arduous or exploitative work, children's perspectives are shaped by a history of past experiences, by the extent to which they identify with and find personal meaning in what they do, and by their beliefs about the place of work in their lives - in the present and in the future. Multiple approaches that acknowledge multiple perspectives, are required to provide a complete picture of the process of child development, and the impact of specific situations and experiences (Greenfield and Cocking, 1994). Ideally, a study of children's perspectives would be complemented by studies of the perspectives of families, teachers, employers, non-working school children etc.

Sceptics about the usefulness of children participating in the formulation of policy and practice might argue that working children, especially young, ill educated working children, are unlikely to be aware of the important issues, less still to be able to articulate them. This image of children as immature thinkers, unable to articulate their feelings and thoughts is another legacy of conventional beliefs about child development, notably Piaget's theory of stages from egocentric thinking to mature understanding. Experience of involving children as participants in research and social action suggest children are much more competent (e.g. Hart, 1997; Johnson et al., 1998). So does recent socio-cultural research into children's capacities for understanding their social world (e.g. Dunn, 1988) as well as studies into the ways children can be supported to think about issues and communicate effectively (Rogoff, 1990; Mercer, 1994). Moreover, as the Radda Barnen study on projects for working children makes clear, interventions that treat children as helpless victims are much less likely to be effective than interventions that seek to support and empower children (Tolfree, 1998). Seeking children's perspectives may be an essential starting-point for planning effective projects.

Listening to children's voices

There is, of course, an overriding reason for ensuring that children's voices are heard in the child labour debate. Children-have the right to be protected from harmful work, but they also have the right to express their views on issues that directly affect them. According to the UN Convention:

> "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child"
> (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 12)

Increasingly, the voice of children and young people is being heard by delegates at major international meetings. (For example, during 1997, eight representatives of movements of working children were invited by the Dutch government to attended a meeting in Amsterdam). Researching children's perspectives is not a substitute for such direct participation. This study aims to complement such initiatives, concentrating on groups of young people in local settings, most of whom have no direct involvement with child workers' organisations, nor with NGOs providing support for working children.

These arguments for taking account of children's perspectives can be summarized as four main points:

- Children have a right to be heard about matters that affect them. Listening to the experiences and perspectives of children living in diverse circumstances is a valuable antidote to the sweeping generalisations about childhood and child development that dominate discussion of the topic;

- Children are capable of expressing their feelings, concerns and aspirations, within contexts that respect their abilities and are adapted to their interests and preferred ways of communicating;

- Children are an important source of evidence on how work may harm their development, in particular economic, family, community and cultural contexts. They may not be aware of certain detrimental effects (e.g. long term health hazards). But they may be acutely aware of others, and their concerns may be an important indicator, especially of the psycho-social effects of work;

- Children are not passively affected by their work - too young and too innocent to understand what is going on. They are active contributors to their social world, trying to make sense of their present circumstances, the constraints and the opportunities available to them. Seeking children's perspectives on their present lives is a first step towards their participation in shaping their future lives.

Listening to children's perspectives does not undermine efforts to combat child labour that is hazardous and exploitative. It provides a much more sound starting point for intervening in ways that are child-centred, context-appropriate and in the best interests of working children.

Chapter 2: Planning a participatory study

This chapter summarises the design of the study and explains the use of a participatory group approach. It explains the development of *The Children's Perspectives Protocol,* describes the sample and provides brief background information about the participants. It also explains the approach to analysis that informed the chapters of this report.

The study was designed to achieve four main aims:

- to develop a research method that would collect systematic information on child work issues - from children's point of view;
- to adapt this research method for use with groups of girls and boys from diverse circumstances engaged in a wide range of occupations, in rural and urban settings;
- to provide an account of young people's experiences, beliefs and feelings about their working lives, including their circumstances, family networks and expectations, work and school, and prospects for the future;
- to contribute to the current debate about the most appropriate strategies for promoting the 'best interests' of children engaged in work that is considered hazardous and/or exploitative.

A participatory group approach

Participatory research methods have become increasingly well established in recent years, notably in the field of Development Studies (Chambers, 1995). By empowering children to construct a representation of their social world, participatory research methods can inform the adult world about children's thoughts, feelings and concerns. They can also be the starting point for children's participation in the process of resolving issues that affect them (Redd Barna, 1994; Johnson, et al., 1995; PLA Notes, 1996; Johnson et al., 1998). The design of this study was informed partly by these participatory methods, as well as by research methods used by developmental and social psychologists, especially for studying children's social cognition and sense of self (Durkin, 1995).

An initial exploratory study with 13/14 year old girls and boys engaged in part-time work in the UK was followed by a pilot study with two groups in AddisAbaba, Ethiopia (shoeshine boys, and girls working as kollo snack vendors). Following pilot work, the research protocol was finalised and the main study carried out by local fieldworkers in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Each fieldworker was asked to convene a series of groups of young people, of the same age, sex and occupation.

The decision to adopt a group approach was influenced by participatory methods,

as well as by focus-group methods. Morgan and Krueger (1993) identify a number of situations where focus-group methods are especially appropriate, all of which apply very strongly to the circumstances of working children:

- when a friendly research method is required, that is respectful and not condescending;

- when participants in research do not have readily accessible ways of talking about a topic - the interaction has a cueing effect, building confidence to contribute feelings that may otherwise not be expressed;

- for working with groups that historically have had limited power and influence... "having the security of being among others who share many of their feelings and experiences, the participants possess a basis for sharing their views" (p15);

- when there is a gap between professional decision-makers and their target audience... "focus groups provide a clear view of how others think and talk, they are a powerful means of exposing professionals to the reality of the... client" (p16).

(Morgan and Krueger, 1993; see also Stewart and Shamdasi, 1990)

Cultural considerations also shaped the decision to adopt a group approach. One-to-one interviews or written questionnaires would have been wholly inappropriate in contexts where young people may be illiterate or semi-literate or where they would find the one-to-one attention of an adult investigator (of perceived high status) highly threatening. The consequence of this decision is that much of the data presented in this report refers to the consensus of group opinion, or to the range of comments offered by members of a group.

The group approach described in this report required a minimum of two fieldworkers, one to facilitate the group (the 'facilitator') and the other to record the information on audio and/or video, as well as in structured note form (the 'recorder'). The fieldworkers were identified through local offices of Radda Barnen in each country/region. All of the fieldworkers had research training and experience, and in some cases they were already very experienced in the use of participatory methods with children. Their local knowledge and ability to communicate informally with young people was essential to the success of the group work. Gender issues were also carefully considered, with the female facilitators normally working with groups of girls. Briefing of the fieldworkers in Ethiopia was carried out on-site, during the course of the pilot study. Briefing of fieldworkers from Bangladesh, The Philippines and the countries of Central America was carried out during a two day workshop in Stockholm.

The local fieldworkers carried out each focus group during a minimum of one half-day session, (although most found shorter sessions conducted over several days much more satisfactory). Participants were recruited by a variety of methods

according to circumstances. For example, vendors and shoeshine boys in Ethiopia were contacted via street workers known to the local Radda Barnen office. In Guatemala, many of the groups were contacted via village schools known to be attended by working young people. In the Philippines, young people in fishing work were identified through the personal and professional contacts of the investigator. The general rule was that participants should be included in the study who had little or no previous contact with agencies working for or on behalf of working children.

Before participants agreed to take part in the study, the purposes were explained in simple terms. The consent of parents, teachers or employers was also sought where local fieldworkers deemed this necessary and in the children's interests. Participants were reimbursed for working-time lost through participating in the study.

Two objectives shaped the plan for group work. One was to provide in-depth case material on particular groups of working children in the context of local situations and circumstances, and adapted to children's preferred ways of expressing feelings and beliefs. A second objective was to provide systematic, comparable data across diverse settings that could meaningfully inform debate, social policy and intervention at national, regional and international level. These objectives were reconciled in construction of *The Children's Perspectives Protocol.* The protocol was flexibly applied in child-centred and context-appropriate ways, but included a core set of activities that would yield comparable data across all settings, occupations and countries.

The Children's Perspectives Protocol

The Children's Perspectives Protocol is summarised as Appendix II to this report. Briefly, it comprises 8 activities:

Activity 1: **`My Day'** invites young people to describe their daily lives, orally and using drawings and mapping techniques;

Activity 2: **`My Work'** explores the circumstances of children's work and the detail of the activities they undertake;

Activity 3: **'Who matters?'** asks about young people's social networks, the quality of key-relationships, as well as their own self-evaluation;

Activity 4: **`Work and school'** asks participants what they consider are the bad as well as the good things about their work, and then repeats the activity for school, before establishing which is their preference;

Activity 5: **`Which work is best?'** asks participants to rank children's occupations (including their own) in terms of relative desirability/undesirability, and explores the criteria on which young people base these judgements;

Activity 6: **`What is a Child?'** examines young people's own views on child development. They are asked to chart a wide range of work activities in terms of age-appropriateness;

Activity 7: **`What if?'** presents young people with common dilemmas facing working children and invites them to comment about what is likely to happen next and what could be done to help;

Activity 8: **'Life-stories'** provides fieldworkers with an opportunity to explore the issues in Activity 1-7 with a particular child, in order to enrich the level of detail provide from group work.

The protocol does not assume that participants are literate. Young people are encouraged to represent their feelings and beliefs in the ways that are most meaningful to them, including drawings, mapping, role play as well as group discussion. The semi-structured activities and games are at the heart of the protocol, focusing on key themes in children's lives. Many are based around locally-produced picture-cards which participants are asked to compare, sort and rank, yielding a combination of individual and group responses.

Each fieldworker prepared a data-summary for each group within their local study, including extensive verbatim quotations from participants, following a standard form based on *The Children's Perspectives Protocol.* These summaries are the starting point for this report. They comprise a combination of qualitative and quantitative information. For several of the activities, children's comments were coded under thematic headings, as described in subsequent chapters.

The sample

Groups were selected to include common child work situations, in four distinct regions of the world. Major criteria for sample selection were:

- **Age group -** the main target group was 10-14 year olds. In the Philippines several younger groups were also included (of boys and of girls 7-10) who were involved in fishing;

- **Gender -** this is a major factor affecting the experience of working children, and occupations are frequently gender-specific. Fieldworkers were advised to seek an overall balance of girls' and boys' groups;

- **Project Support -** A key decision was made at the outset that this study should concentrate on children who have little or no current involvement with projects that provide support to working children in terms of welfare services, education, advocacy etc.

- **Occupation -** A particular effort was made to counterbalance the tendency to concentrate on urban street-based workers. So the sample was planned to include groups in agriculture, fishing, mining, small manufacturing, domestic

work, sex work, as well as a range of street based occupations (vending, shoeshine, porters etc).

Local fieldworkers sought to include occupational groups that were considered at risk of harm or exploitation. But it is important to emphasise that the study makes no claims to be based on a representative sample of the population of working children, always assuming it were possible to define the parameters of that population. The issue of representativeness also applies within each country - some major occupations may not be represented.

Practical considerations strongly influenced the occupations included in the study, including access, local experience, costs as well as local priorities for study of hitherto neglected occupations. Local fieldworkers were advised to include a minimum of two groups for each occupation selected. This report is based on a total of 49 groups, involving 318 participants, as shown in Table 2.1. Detailed accounts of the circumstances of twenty of the occupations are given in Appendix 1.

In presenting the results of this investigation it is important to emphasise that this is a relatively small sample. Generalisation, especially about particular occupations would be inappropriate. Nonetheless, in an area of social policy where there is a shortage of systematic research into children's perspectives, the study indicates the range of children's views and the key issues on which they appear to share a good deal in common.

Table 2.1. Summary of Groups and participants

	Boys		Girls		All groups	
	groups	children	group	children	groups	children
Philippines						
Fishing	3	20	3	18	6	38
Domestics			2	13	2	13
Farming	2	13	1	6	3	19
Plantation	1	5	1	. S	2	10
TOTAL	6	38	7	42	13	80

	Boys		Girls		All groups	
	groups	children	groups	children	groups	children
Bangladesh						
Workshop	2	13			2	13
Porter	2	14			2	14
Brickchipper			2	16	2	16
Domestics			2	14	2	14
Agriculture	2	15			2	15
TOTAL	6	42	4	30	10	72

	Boys		Girls		All groups	
	groups	children	groups	children	groups	children
Ethiopia						
Shoeshine	2	14			2	14
Kollo seller			2	10	2	10
News vendor	2	13			2	13
Sex worker			2	12	2	12
TOTAL	4	27	4	22	8	49

	Boys		Girls		All groups	
	groups	children	groups	children	groups	children
Guatemala						
Fireworks	1	6	1	6	2	12
Lead mine	1	6			1	6
Agric. Brocolli			1	6	1	6
Agric.Cardamom	1	6	1	6	2	12
TOTAL	3	18	3	18	6	36

	Boys		Girls		All groups	
	groups	children	group	children	groups	childre
Nicaragua						
Market	1	8	1	8	2	16
Vendor	1	7	1	6	2	13
Farming	1	4	1	12	2	16
TOTAL	3	19	3	26	6	45

	Boys		Girls		All groups	
	groups	children	groups	children	groups	children
El Salvador						
Market	1	7	1	7	2	14
Supermarket	1	6			1	6
Flower vendor			1	4	1	4
Farming	1	6	1	6	2	12
TOTAL	3	19	3	17	6	36

OVERALL	25	163	24	155	49	318

Basic information about participants

Each participant was asked for basic details about their home, family and schooling experiences. This was supplemented by information available to local researchers to produce a profile of the group.

Gender: 51% participants were boys.
49% of participants were girls.

Age group: 21 % under 11 years;
36% 11-12 years old;
37% 13-14 years old;
6% 15 years old or of unknown age.

The age distribution was similar for each country except for The Philippines, which accounted for almost half of the children under 11. This was due to two fishing groups being convened specifically for younger children.

Origin: Overall 47% of participants were described by the fieldworkers as having grown up in a rural or coastal area, 33% as urban, and 18% as having migrated to the city during their childhood. However there were significant country differences. All the work in Ethiopia was carried out in Addis Ababa, so none of these children were rural. Conversely, with few exceptions the participants in The Philippines and Guatemala are from a rural context.

Home: This study chose to concentrate on working children who are based with (or accountable to) their parents or other close family members. Many of these children were working 'on the streets', as vendors, shoeshine etc., but they were not children 'of the streets' in the sense of being homeless or abandoned (Glauser 1990). Altogether 87% of group participants were currently living with a parent or parents (usually as well as siblings). A further 6% were living with another relative (e.g. sibling or aunt). Just 6% were living with 'others', including some of the domestic workers in Bangladesh and The Philippines who were living with their employer but were accountable to their parents. The only children in the study who could be described as living independently of their families were the sex workers in Ethiopia, several of whom lived with friends or on the street.

School: Another feature is that (at the time of the study) a majority of the children were combining their work with attending school. Ensuring children's school attendance is frequently proposed as a key strategy for combating child labour (e.g. Unicef, 1997). At the very least, children's attendance will have an impact on their working lives, and it can be expected to be reflected in their perspectives on their work. Overall 61% of the participants were currently attending school either full-time or part-time. A further 20% had dropped out of school by the time of the study. Only 19% report that they have never attended school. However these overall figure disguise between-country variations. The percentage of participants currently in school part- or full-time was:

Bangladesh 8 %
Ethiopia 57%
Nicaragua 58%
The Philippines 79%
El Salvador 86%
Guatemala 100%

As expected, these variations in children's experience of school were associated with variations in their perspective on their working lives.

Involvement in projects for working children: As part of the protocol, all the

children were asked about their participation in projects to support working children. Only 6% reported a current involvement.

Three main reasons shaped this decision to concentrate on children outside projects. Firstly, it reflects reality; most of the world's working children do not have the benefit of projects and programmes designed to support and protect them. Secondly, it is sometimes argued that the young people who have attended at major national and international meetings in recent years, offer an unrepresentative view on the situation of working children, by virtue of their involvement in an advocacy programme. By concentrating on 'ordinary' working children, this study aimed to represent young voices that would otherwise not be heard. Finally, this study is part of a larger Radda Barnen project. A parallel study has focused specifically on the experiences of working children who are involved in or supported by programmes in Bangladesh, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Peru and Senegal (Tolfree, 1998).

Design of the report

One approach to preparing this report would have been to summarise the perspectives of each occupational group in turn. To do so would emphasise the uniqueness of each groups' experience, and draw attention to the importance of making sure that interventions on behalf of working children are appropriate to their particular context and circumstances. Appendix I goes some way towards achieving this aim, providing a brief account of 20 occupational situations included in the study. The main body of the report has taken a different, thematic approach, based on activities in *The Children's Perspectives Protocol.* Chapters about the place of work in children's lives are followed by chapters on what children think are the 'good things' and the 'bad things' about work, and about school, as well as chapters on parental expectations and self-concept. The aim has been to draw out major themes shared by large numbers of children participating in this study, at a sufficiently generalised level to inform debate and policy planning at national and international level. At the same time I aim to show where there are consistent patterns of variation, related to country context, occupation, gender, access to schooling etc. Finally, inclusion of individual children's voices in the report is a reminder that general principles, policies and laws about children's work will only serve children's interests if they are framed in such a way that they can address many millions of unique situations. In the final analysis, it is these variable and unique experiences of working children that must be the starting point for interventions that are effective and in their best interests.

Chapter 3: The place of work in children's lives

We begin this account of working children's perspectives by asking three sets of questions:

- How does 'work' fit into the daily lives of working children? In what ways is their experience of work shaped by their gender, circumstances and school attendance?
- How did they get started as working children? How far is their work controlled by their families? Did they have any choice in the matter?
- From what age do working children themselves believe girls and boys should work, and doing what kinds of jobs? What reasons do they give for these judgements?

Answers to these questions are based mainly on Activities 1, 2 and 6 of The Children's Perspectives Protocol (see Appendix II)

Work in daily lives

Figure 3.1 (see page 32) illustrates some of the contrasting daily lives of children in this study. At one extreme are groups where daily life consists of little more than work. Daily Profile 1 summarises daily life for a group of domestic workers in the Philippines. These girls live with their employers and are on call day and night. They describe their day as a never-ending round of cleaning the house and yard, going to the market, washing clothes, ironing them and putting them away, taking children to school and fetching them back at the end of the day, preparing food, cooking and washing-up, cleaning toilets and bedrooms and caring for plants. There is not even free time in the evenings, when they are expected to make snacks for their employers, babysit small children etc.

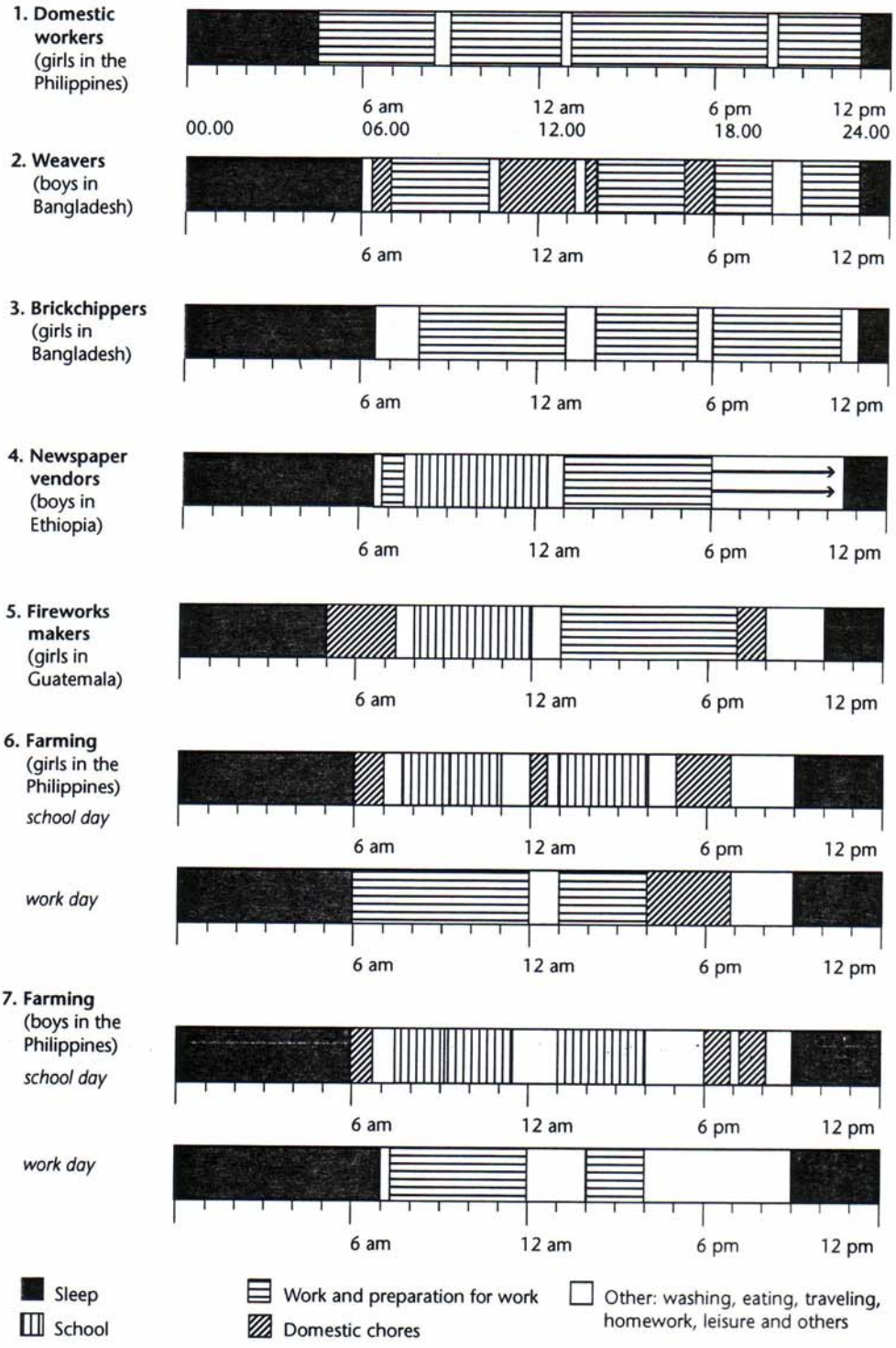
Working lives are equally unremitting for the boys from the Bihari community working in the informal sector in Dhaka, Bangladesh. One group hand-weave saries in gold, silver and silk threads. The other group embroider satin, silk and cotton fabric:

> "In this embroidery work our hands ache, our eyes ache, our knees ache, our legs become numb. Many times the needle sticks into our fingers. It's like a hook. It's very painful when the needle comes out because some of the flesh comes out with it."

Daily Profile 2 summarises the way the weavers described their lives, working six days a week for anything up to 10 or 11 hours a day, with little free time for play, relaxation, or anything else.

The girls who break bricks in Bangladesh also described a long working day in

Work in daily lives



Daily Profile 3. But unlike the weavers, their working day is divided between work outside the home for an employer and the domestic chores they have to do in and around the home. By the time they go to the brickchipping fields at 7 or 8 am they've often already done several hours of chores. After they have worked at brickchipping for 2 or 3 hours, they break-off to help prepare family meals, collect water, wash clothes etc. Sometimes they do not finally rest until around 11 at night. If they hurt themselves breaking bricks, they say they just get extra chores to do:

> "If our fingers get smashed under the hammer, we still have to continue working. If I go home after hurting myself, my mother will send me either to collect firewood or do the groceries or do other household work. I can't get rest."

These three daily profiles are for groups of children who don't currently go to school. But 61% of children in the study were attending school. For all these children, the challenge is to combine the demands that they work hard to earn money with expectations that they work equally hard to do well at school. The daily lives of a group of newspaper vendors in Ethiopia illustrates the pattern (Daily Profile 4). These boys start early by going to the distributor to buy their newspapers, about 10-30 copies each. What they like to do' is get out onto the street straightaway and sell during the morning, when the demand is greatest. But these boys have been put down for the morning school shift, so they can't start selling until the afternoon. Making sure they sell all their papers is a major worry; to make sure they at least recover their capital investment each day. A boy arriving back home still holding copies of that day's newspaper is not popular, so the boys often stay out late in the evening, gradually reducing their price in the hope of getting a sale.

The girls who make fireworks in Guatemala also have to balance school in the morning with work in the afternoon. But unlike their brothers, they also have to complete domestic chores, before they even set-off for school, as summarised in Daily Profile 5. This example draws attention to the gender divisions that shape children's working lives. Many occupations are gender segregated, with boys in the higher status occupations. Girls may have fewer work choices and their prospects may be more constrained. And unlike their brothers they may feel a 'triple burden' of responsibilities: to do chores, earn money and do well in school.

For many girls in the Philippines, daily lives are even more complicated by having to fit work and chores around a full schoolday. Daily Profile 6 summarises two daily patterns. On school days this group of girls divide their day between attending classes and doing domestic chores, spending little time working on the land, except during busy harvest times, when they absent themselves from school for 3-4 days per week. On work days, they still have to do their chores, but the time they would have spent at school is given over to planting, hoeing, weeding and tending livestock. The split between work and schooldays applies equally to boys from the same community. But on both days the boys describe having much more free time than girls, as illustrated in Daily Profile 7

While all these children would wish that their hours were shorter, their pay and work conditions better, the opportunities for play and relaxation greater etc., their attitudes to their work are shaped by many other considerations, especially about the circumstances that make their work necessary.

Work in family lives

Contrary to popular images of working children acting autonomously in the street and market place, most children in this study were working in order to support themselves and their family, and they felt strongly accountable to their parents or other family members. We encouraged group participants to talk about the reasons for working and about how they got started. We wanted to know how far they felt coerced by their families into working, and how far they felt able to take some initiative and responsibility for what they do. As a child, there is nothing remarkable about being required to do things against your will, as many reluctant school children in affluent Western societies know only too well. So, how far do working children feel they are forced to work?

One domestic worker in Bangladesh recalled a harrowing experience:

> "a neighbour... took me away from the village to Dhaka... I didn't want to go... but ...my mother forced me to. The night before I was leaving I cried a lot."

Such comments were rare, because most of the children in this study lived with their families. Much more frequent were comments like these from children in Guatemala. The first is from a girl farm worker. The second from a boy lead miner:

> "Yes, they do (make us work). They tell us that we must go picking, that's what we're here for... to help with the work."

> "We work to have food, if we stop working (in the mine) we will starve to death... We would go some place else to look for work to have food."

Many children felt parents demanded that they work, but they also understood the reason why they didn't have much choice in the matter. In contexts of poverty, work is about survival. A weaver in the informal sector in Bangladesh put it very directly:

> "... we work for our stomach. If we don't work there is no food, no clothes. If we don't work how will we survive?"

In a farming community in Northern Philippines, a group of boys saw the necessity of work in a more positive light. They recognised the pressure on their fathers to produce a high yield, and they do their best to help:

> "We do whatever they teach us and expect us to do because we want to help. So if my father says 'we all go to the field to harvest', we all go. Our main job is to help however we can."

This group recognised the importance of taking on their share of the work. A boy making fireworks in Guatemala made the point even more directly:

> "No one forced me. I learned myself, out of curiosity... I had some friends, they went to get the material with their mother, I went with them and saw how they did the work. Since then, I've been working in my house on my own."

These children referred to their personal decision to work, because of their awareness of their families' circumstances, and also because of the personal pride they feel as a result of their efforts. They didn't see anything wrong about their working childhoods. On the contrary, asked whether he had a choice to work, one boy in fishing replied:

> "We do not understand your question. Choice of what?... It is not a choice. To work is a natural thing to do. Our friends do it. My parents work. My brothers work so why shouldn't I work? Even schooling is not an excuse not to work..."

Work may be tough, but it is not an unnatural thing for children to do, according to these children. It is a way of life for their family and community. They are valued for it, and they were initiated at a very early age, as this farm worker in The Philippines explained:

> "As far as I can remember, I was working the moment I began to remember things. I think it is natural for children to do these things. What else can we do in the village?"

Strong identification with her parents' work motivated a brickchipper in Bangladesh:

> "When I was a child I used to cry for a hammer. So my mother bought me a hammer and I started breaking bricks."

This theme (of early initiation into the importance of contributing to the family) runs through numerous of the children's accounts, as by these boys working the lead mines of Guatemala:

> "I'm 12, I started working when I was 5, so I've been working in the mines for 7 years... There are many holes. You can fall into one and can't get out because they are very deep... There are very long tunnels of water... The walls may cave-in, and you are buried once and for all, they don't find you... Yes, it's dangerous, very dangerous."

A farm worker in El Salvador spoke out about her long apprenticeship and especially the tough treatment, if she didn't meet her parents' expectations:

> "When I was four, I already helped my mother to wash corn and wash dishes, and if I didn't wash them they would hit me real hard... when I was eight they

would put me to grind and to make tortillas... now that I'm thirteen I help my father to do his work to carry firewood and help him pull corn... I have to do all the housework, sweep, take care of the little ones, when my mother leaves I am at home with all the work... I take care of my six brothers."

Repeatedly, these young people's complaints are balanced by an awareness that their families depend on their work, and expect them to contribute their income. A porter in Bangladesh noted:

"If I don't bring home money for a few days, my parents say 'we have been working so hard for you children but you haven't become a good human being' then I feel like crying for hurting them and try harder to earn."

Some work and earn money relatively independently, such as this fireworks maker in Guatemala:

"We keep some and the rest we give to our mothers to help with household expenses."

Others work without payment or even pocket money. This was especially common amongst girls' groups, even amongst the domestic workers in Bangladesh whose mothers collected their wages for them:

"There are times when I feel like eating or buying something, I ask my mother to give me Tk 2 (which would buy a few sweets or a fruit). But when she gives the money, I realise how difficult it is at times for her to run the family and I return the money."

Whether earning or not, working for themselves or for an employer, most children in this study feel strongly accountable to parents or other relatives. These accounts forcefully illustrate the theme that the potential harm and benefit of work has to be understood in context. Work does not affect children in isolation. Their work is embedded in the micro-economics of family and community, frequently endorsed by cultural traditions and by parental beliefs and expectations; (see chapters 9 and 10). It isn't just parents that have expectations about work. Part of children's initiation into their working lives includes assimilating values and beliefs about children's work. For example, how old do children have to be to start working? ,

Work in children's development

While child development experts largely exclude work from their definitions of what childhood is about, working children themselves hold a different view.

Activity 6 of *The Children's Perspectives Protocol* explored children's own views about the age-appropriateness of different kinds of work. Using a timeline, groups were asked to sort picture-cards into 5 broad age-bands. Although not always familiar with chronological ages, especially in contexts where birthdays are not celebrated, indirect use of other indicators (e.g. school grades) enabled approximate

rankings to be completed. Despite the difficulties of carrying out this activity, there are sufficient consistencies in the way children sorted occupations according to age to draw out some general lessons. To illustrate the kind of information collected, Table 3.1 is a summary of the age-bands selected by four groups in Bangladesh.

Table 3.1 Children's views on the youngest age at which they can do various types of work - examples from four groups in Bangladesh

	Porters (Boys)	informal sector - Weavers (Boys)	Domestic workers (Girls)	Brickchippers (Girls)
Minimum ages				
18 and over	cart puller brickchipper	cart puller rickshaw puller		
15 to 17 years old				cart puller
12 to 14 years old	rickshaw puller	garment worker porter	rickshaw puller cart puller	garment worker rickshaw puller
9 to 11 years old	garment worker tempo helper porter	tempo helper	garment worker tempo helper flower seller	porter tempo helper brickchipper
under 8 years old	domestic helper flower seller	weaving brickchipper domestic helper flower seller	porter brickchipper domestic helper	domestic helper flower seller

A first lesson from this activity is that children are able to make judgements of this kind. They do have a view about the age-appropriateness of their own occupation, by comparison with other tasks that children do. The same kinds of work were judged by most groups in Bangladesh as appropriate for very young children, (notably domestic helper, brickchipping, flower selling); other kinds of work tended to be placed in the middle age bands (notably garment work, tempohelper and porter), while others were seen as more suitable for adults (notably cart pulling). The groups in Ethiopia also showed some consistency in their judgements of when _children could start work, placing various kinds of street work into the youngest age bands (shoeshine, car watcher, snack vendor, news vendor, lottery seller etc.); taxi-boy and maid in the middle bands; while driver, guard and typist were reserved for over eighteens. Similarly in Nicaragua, shoeshine and street vending were most often seen as appropriate for younger age bands (along with domestic chores, cutting and carrying firewood, looking after siblings). These groups expected an older starting age for what they saw as the more responsible, skilled or prestigious jobs (such as bus fare collecting, mechanic or guard).

A second lesson is that children's judgements about age of starting work are frequently inseparable from their views on gender appropriateness (and in some

cases also social class appropriateness). For example in Ethiopia, shoeshine, car watching and newspaper selling is seen as work for young boys, while girls are more likely to be engaged in snack selling ('kollo'), domestic work as maids or cooking ('injera' cereal). In The Philippines, domestic work, baby-sitting and market work is for girls, fishing and construction work is for boys, while fish vending, farming and factory work are viewed as appropriate for both girls and boys. These divisions also apply to chores at home, as some Bangladesh brickchippers' comments illustrate:

> "Boys will do (domestic chores) only if their sisters are not around or if they don't have sisters and their mothers are working somewhere else... If their sisters are around they will say, `Am I a girl that I must cook? If my sister can't cook now what will she do when she goes to her husband's house'... If sisters are at home mothers don't allow their sons to fetch water. The boys will say, `You are a girl, you will do it. Why should I do it when you are here? You will have to do it in your husband's home.'"

A third lesson is that in some cases, young people were making much more complex judgements than simply about the earliest age for particular kinds of work. They were also thinking about the latest age either girls or boys should be doing particular kind of work. In other words, their judgements were based on views about the life-phase or stage-appropriateness of children's jobs. Comments from groups in Bangladesh well-illustrate some of the participants' sophisticated reasoning. One of the girls in the group of brickchippers explained why she thought flower selling should be started from the age of eight years:

> "They can move around and customers will have pity seeing such young girls selling flowers. Out of pity they will buy from them."

Like flower selling, being a domestic helper was consistently placed in the youngest category for starting work. This might seem surprising in view of the long hours and ill-treatment described by this group. But brickchippers believe domestic helpers stand a better chance if they start with their employer before they reach the age of eight:

> "It is good to start as this age because the employers like them better than older girls as they are still small. They will be given regular meals and have good health and later the employers can also marry them off."

Domestic helpers agreed that domestic work was best started early. They also felt that there is an optimal age to learn various skills:

> "At seven or eight years old she learns the work at home. Then by the age of nine or ten she can start as a domestic helper."

But these girls groups didn't always apply the 'early is best rule'. Some comments suggested a sense of what is developmentally appropriate, as for example by this domestic worker:

"It's good to learn the work between eight and twelve years because (at that age) you can learn fast. Below eight years it takes too much time to learn the work. After fourteen years it becomes too late."

A brickchipper thought in similar terms about some of the domestic chores girls are expected to do:

"Below ten years old it is very hard for a girl to fetch water in a big vessel. But if she uses a small vessel she will have to fetch water several times a day... Below ten years old a girl can't wash clothes cleanly. She can't wring bedsheets and blankets well. It is difficult for her."

The brickchippers weren't sure an early start was right for their occupation either. They weighed-up the benefits of early initiation against young girls' vulnerability to the hazards of the job:

"It is good to learn brickchipping from eight years. But (at this age) it is too much when her finger is smashed with a hammer or a brick chip gets into her eye. She won't be able to bear it. She will scream. So its better to start from ten years old. It will be less painful for her."

But young peoples' thinking wasn't just influenced by beliefs about when children are best able to learn or when they are most at risk of injury. These brickchippers were also aware of the value placed on early work within their society, and that it might be at the expense of their health:

"If you learn (brickchipping) from a young age then no one can speak ill of you. And when you do the work they praise you. But if you do too much work at a young age then your health becomes bad. Even so... If you only learn (to do brickchipping) after growing older, then others will make you feel ashamed. They will say bad things about you to your mother. That is why no matter how hard it may be it's good to learn to work when young."

One of the reasons these girls seemed resigned to working from a young age is that they were looking ahead to puberty, when gender issues override issues of maturity and social convention would restrict work opportunities:

"When she is ten years old, a girl can carry a basket on her head and no one will talk ill of her. She can work alongside other boys because she is still young. After a few more years she will no longer be able to work as a porter. "

These beliefs were echoed by boys working as weavers in the informal sector:

"... after eleven years old, girls become *jawan* (reach puberty) and they should not be working outside the house because soon they will be married... If they learn to work early then when they get married and go to their husbands' house then they won't have problems doing it."

One of these boys was equally uncompromising in his belief that apprenticeship as a weaver should start from the age of four years:

> "This is a respectable job. By starting at an early age a boy brings honour to his family. Also he learns the skill early. If he starts with Tk 10, by the time he is eleven years he will be earning Tk 200 to Tk 300 and might soon become a weaver."

In prospect of making good money, they were willing to put up with a great deal:

> "The worst work is weaving as there is a lot of verbal and physical abuse... But (since we have no choice but to work) the best work is also weaving, because we are sitting in a room and learning a skill which will give us more money than other occupations."

These boys thought very differently about rickshaw and cart pulling:

> "If a boy starts pulling rickshaw when he is 14 years old he will die by the time he is 17 years old because it is very hard work and needs a lot of strength which he doesn't have at that age. This work is harmful for one's health."

When a group of porters were asked about the age-appropriateness of different jobs, their replies were strongly linked to a sense of career through a series of childhood occupations:

> "Boys should start as a domestic helper by eight years because when they grow a little older they will be doing better work than this. Domestic work can be done by a boy who has just come from the village and doesn't know his way around and whose parents can't feed him well... If we start being a tempo helper from the age of eleven years, then by the time we are fourteen years we can learn how to drive the tempo... Boys can start the work of a porter between ten and eleven years because he will slowly get to know the market environment and also learn to know his way around."

It seemed to be just as important that boys establish themselves in work from an early age, as it is for girls. This brickchipper explained the reason why:

> "A boy who knows how to work is valued in the eyes of parents who want to give their daughter in marriage because then parents feel secured. It is good for boys to know all kinds of work when young because then they can do any work and feed their parents."

Finally, note that in making these judgements, participants in the study sometimes wanted to draw a distinction between how things might be in an ideal world, and their more realistic judgements about their own circumstances. For example one of the porters reflected:

"The best work is to go to school, study and play around - not to be involved

in any occupation. But God has not given us the ability to enjoy such luxury." A Domestic worker put her dilemma even more directly:

> "It is good if all work can be started from 17 years of age but will we be able to hold onto our hungry stomachs until then?!"

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates young people thinking actively about the work they do. For some, work takes up the major part of daily life. For many more it is combined with going to school, either full-time or part-time, and (especially for girls) it has to be combined with domestic chores. Very often, young people do not like the work they have to do, nor the way they are treated, but equally often they appreciate their families' circumstances, that make their work so necessary, and which for many is a source of pride.

They are often aware of the constraints that shape their experience of growing up: their relative poverty; their family's traditions and expectations; the inequality of adult-child power relations; the significance of their age, gender and position in their family; the importance attached to school and the problems of attending in practice etc. Within these constraints, children negotiate ways to make the best of their situation, and they make choices within the limited range of opportunities available to them.

Working children are also able to view their work in a long term perspective. They talk about how and why they got started and they talk about how their present work links to future prospects and difficulties. In many cases they are also able to make complex judgements about the appropriateness of work for different ages, for girls and for boys, and explain the reasons why.

The children's perspectives summarised in this chapter have provided some first impressions about the place of work in their lives. These perspectives are the proper starting point for asking how work may harm children, and about the most appropriate approach to supporting their development. The case for taking children's perspectives as a starting point becomes even more compelling in the next chapter, on children's beliefs about which work is best.

Chapter 4: Which work is best?

Chapter 3 has already illustrated working children's awareness of their situation and their ability to make judgements about the age-appropriateness of various kinds of work. Most come into contact with a wide range of occupations, especially if they work on the streets, where they are surrounded by other working children. Some young people will have done several different kinds of work themselves or heard from other children or older relatives about their work experiences. This chapter asks about children's views about how their own work compares to others, based on Activity 5 of *The Children's Perspectives Protocol.*

- What are the views of working children about occupations available to children in their situation?
- What criteria do working children use to judge which kinds of work are best and which are worst?
- How do they rate their own occupation compared with other children? If an occupation is consistently viewed either positively or negatively, this may be an important indicator of where it sits on the hypothetical continuum from 'intolerable' to 'more tolerable' (or even 'desirable'), at least in children's eyes. In addition, if children rate their own occupation either positively or negatively, this may be an indicator of their occupational self-esteem. Groups that consistently denigrate their own work may be most at risk.

Activity 5

Activity 5 of *The Children's Perspectives Protocol* asked groups to sort five (or in some cases six) familiar children's occupations, using picture-cards laid out along the floor as a prompt. Ranking of occupations from the 'best' to the 'worst' was achieved through a process of progressive comparisons. First the children were asked to judge their own occupation by comparison with each of the other occupation-cards in turn. This resulted in two groups of occupations - those 'better than ours' and those 'worse than ours'. Then children were asked to sort within these groups. In this way, children with little experience of ranking, were enabled to layout the cards in rank order. At each stage, the children were asked to give their reasons for the judgements made. In general, groups were able to reach agreement in this occupational ranking. Where there were differences of view, the majority view has been taken to represent the group-opinion.

Through this activity young people demonstrated their ability to weigh up multiple considerations, about income, independence and autonomy, security, safety, health, openness to abuse, gender appropriateness etc. An extract from the transcript of one of the shoeshine groups in Ethiopia illustrates the point.

The group facilitator (GF) begins by holding up the picture-card of the boys' occupation (Shoeshine) and asks them to compare it with another picture-card (of a Car Watcher). The shoeshine boys (SSBs) reply:

SSBs Thieves will steal from us; we prefer shoeshining.

GF How? Tell me.

SSBs If we are attending to a car, for example, it may be taken away from us by force. If the indicator light is stolen, the driver/owner will hold us responsible. But the shoeshine box is our own, there is no other problem. If you make money, good; if you don't, you just have to accept it.

GF Compared with your job, which of these is the most difficult?

SSBs Attending to vehicles.

GF Is standing guard to (parked) vehicles, the worst one? You have understood the question right?

SSBs Yes. Yes. Thieves beat you

GF Why?

SSBs Thieves cause trouble. For example, if the thief wants to remove some parts of the car, he will tell you to move away, to clear away from the area; he will beat you. And if some part or something in the car is lost, the driver will hold you responsible.

GF Alright. Which of these is bad? (Holds up Shoeshine and Taxi-boy)

SSBs Taxi-boy.

GF Why Taxi-boy? Is it the worst of all these?

SSBs For health matters.

GF What else?

SSBs You may fall off the taxi, you may be accused of cheating on the sum of collected fee (money). You will be in difficulty.

GF What else? Enough?

GF Which of these three is bad? (Holds up Newspaper seller, Lottery seller and farming)

SSBs Selling newspapers. GF

Tell me the reason?

SSbs It may become outdated fast. Exposure to the sun. If it is outdated, you will lose money; it is only 50 cents each that papers are sold for after the publishing date.

GF The Farming and the Lottery seller, which of these two is the worst?

SSBs Lottery ticket vending. Farming.

GF How many of you consider farming? ... Five. Tell me the reason.

SSBs We don't have the strength... We lack experience... The oxen may endanger us, for we lack experience.

GF OK. This is the last (Lottery seller). Why (do you not like this work)?

SSBs Carrying it around will expose us to the sun. If it doesn't sell out in time we may be in deficit.

GF Why have you selected working as shoeshine (as the best)? Tell me your reasons?

SSBs If we lose it, it is our individual property... If you make some money or if you don't there is not much harm. You will wait for the next day... Not lose, like selling newspapers... And unless you roam to places, you won't lose... We only lose as a shoeshine when or if customers are not coming and if polish is not available."

Children's judgements on this activity suggested a discrepancy between adult preconceptions of hazardous work and children's own perceptions. To begin with, there was a tendency for groups to favour their own occupation. Complete data was available for 24 groups in three countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and The Philippines). 6 out of 11 girls' groups (55%) and 9 out 13 boys' groups (69%) rated their own occupation either best or second best. The gender difference in occupational self-esteem was accounted for by a small number of occupations. Two out of the three most highly self-rated occupations (where both groups ranked their own work as the best), were carried out by boys: shoeshine in Ethiopia (2 groups of boys, including the example above), and informal sector (weavers and embroiderers) in Bangladesh (2 groups of boys).

I have already quoted from shoeshine boys in Ethiopia. The boys in the informal sector (embroidery workshops in Bangladesh) were also able to explain why they think their work is best:

> "In this work, we can one day become *a mohajon* (employer) and everyone will respect us."

Already these boys felt they had some skills to offer. If one employer pays less well, they say they will leave to find another:

> "It might take a while to get embroidery work with another *mohajon,* but if one knows this skill well it is not difficult to find work."

While these groups all ranked their occupation most highly, this does not necessarily mean the occupation was highly favoured amongst children in general. For example, in The Philippines, the two groups of children in farm work both ranked their own occupation the best:

> "This is the best work... we don't have to leave our families... we work with our parents... we can feed the whole nation."

Groups working in fishing thought differently about their peers in farming:

"It is hot in the sugar fields. You easily get tired. Your body is itching... Agricultural work is very dangerous to children because the arms may be cut by a scythe or bolo."

These children were keen to assert the positive aspects of their work in fishing, a view that was not shared by the farming children:

"There is no money if there is no catch... you may get drowned."

Turning to the other end of the scale, sex work stood apart from the other occupations children were asked to judge. The two groups of female prostitutes in Ethiopia both ranked their occupation amongst the worst. As one girl said:

"It is better being called thief than being called prostitute."

And their view was shared by the other two girls' groups in Ethiopia (snack vendors) both of which viewed the sex industry as the worst work. Their view was shared by groups in other countries, for example, as one of the girls in the farming group in the Philippines put it:

"We would rather die as a farmer than live as a prostitute."

These rankings don't just tell us about children's occupational self-esteem, they also tell us about the occupational status-hierarchy, and in some cases the occupational career that children would like to pursue, as conditioned by their particular circumstances. These young peoples' judgements were clearly conditioned by their experience and by their sense of what was a realistic aspiration for young people in their situation.

An example from Bangladesh

The study in Bangladesh well illustrates these complex judgements. Data from four groups of boys is presented in Table 4.1

	Informal sector Group 1	Informal sector Group 2	Porter Group 1	Porter Group 2
Occupations	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
Rower seller	3	2		4
Brickchipper	5	5	4	5
Domestic	6	3	5	3
Porter	4	4	3 *	2*
Tempo helper	2	6	1	1
W. sector	1 *	1 *	-	-

* own occupation

First note that neither group of street-based porters viewed their own work very favourably. Both groups rated the job of a 'tempo helper' much higher, very largely as a route that might lead to becoming a 'tempo driver':

"They can earn much more than a porter because they also get the chance to make extra money as well as get two free meals a day... By being a helper one can gradually become a driver."

Only one boy had reservations:

"It is very risky to be a tempo helper. I might fall off and break my bones. I will not be able to do this work... I can also earn a lot by being a porter."

These measured judgements about costs and benefits were also shown amongst boys involved in a very different occupation - weaving valuable 'Benarsi' saris in the informal sector. One group of boys had a low-opinion of work as a tempohelper:

"This kind of work is done by children who live in the slums. All those who do this occupation are thieves and pickpocketeers."

Their pride in their own work overshadowed any hardships they suffered. As already noted in Chapter 3, they felt that their work as weavers is the most strenuous of all, comparable to brickchipping. They spoke of having to work long hours without a fan and being subject to abuse. But they compare their position favourably to the abuse received by tempo helpers and porters:

"A porter often gets beaten by customers.. .We too get beaten and verbally abused frequently, but then it is from only one person (the employer) not the public."

They were convinced their work is best, not least because it was part of family tradition:

"In this work we can maintain our parents' respectability."

Amongst the girls' occupations (Table 4.2), neither brickchipping nor domestic

Table 4.2: Which work is best? Girls' groups in Bangladesh

	Brickchipper Group 1	Brickchipper Group 2	Domestic Group 1	Domestic Group 2
Occupations	, Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
Flower seller	1	2	3	3
Brickchipper	3*	2*	5	4
Domestic	4	4	1*	2*
Porter	5	5	4	5
Garment worker	2	1	2	1

* own occupation

work was viewed very favourably by any other occupational group. For example, brickchipping was seen as the worst kind of work by boys working in embroidery within the informal sector:

"It is poorly paid and very hard work... (As a brickchipper)... I would have to sit and work under the sun the whole day... Even if my head is spinning due to working under the sun, *malik* (employer) will insist that I continue to break bricks. And when it comes to paying he will pay me less since I was unable to break a lot."

Porters viewed brickchipping in a similar way:

"I would not like to do this work because it is very hard. ..The hand aches a lot and there are blisters on the fingers. Also the hammer can crush your fingers and the brick chips can get into your eyes and turn you blind."

The girls working as domestic helpers also ranked brickchipping low on their list: "This is the worst kind of work because employers cheat you."

Turning to views about domestic work, this was also generally ranked low amongst everyone other than the domestic workers themselves. Concern centred on vulnerability to exploitation and abuse at the hands of an employer from whom there was little escape. The value of independence was a recurring theme, especially for street-based workers. Participants in one of the porter groups said:

"It is not good to work for someone. Even if you have not stolen anything you are made a thief because the *Saheb* thinks so... If I don't feel like it I won't work for a day but a domestic helper has to work even if he doesn't want to."

Even the girls in the two brickchipper groups viewed their work as preferable to being a domestic helper. While they were used to harsh treatment from their own parents, they saw this as preferable to being beaten by an employer:

"Parents feed us - they can also beat us. But getting beaten in other people's home we couldn't bear."

The vulnerability of the domestic worker, at the mercy of her employer was highlighted by another participant:

"She has to wash clothes, wash utensils and mop floors everyday. There is no respite even when she is unwell. *Bibi saheb* will say, 'take a tablet and work. (Whereas in brickchipping...) the day I feel unwell I can take a rest. My mother will ask me not to work that day, but it is not the same in domestic helping."

The domestic helpers themselves thought differently. They recognise these difficulties of their work. Even so they assert the positive aspects:

"We get to eat well and work within the house instead of burning under the sun like in brickchipping."

Another concentrated on the household skills she was learning:

"So that when a girl gets married and goes to her in-laws house she will be

appreciated for her work."

Sense of shame was a major issue for young women in the Bangladesh groups. For example, a group of brickchippers recognised their low public status:

"Everyone sees you sitting and working on the road and they know the kind of work you do."

Although this group preferred brickchipping over domestic work, they recognised that being a domestic helper had the advantage of being carried out in private:

"As a domestic helper... no one can see what work you are doing. It is within the house".

A member of this group also explained why being a porter was ranked so low - it is seen as an unsuitable occupation for girls:

"Girls have to safeguard their honour. That is why they can't do this work... They don't take baskets on their heads. They only carry it in their hands."

In contrast, flower-selling has the advantage of being respectable:

"Even though you have to work on the streets it is more respectable than a porter's work because you carry flowers in your hands... so people appreciate instead of putting you to shame."

Besides flower-selling, the one occupation that was strongly favoured by these four groups of girls in Bangladesh was in clothing manufacture (see Table 4.2). Constrained by their age, gender and circumstances, they view being a garment worker as one of the few desirable alternatives:

"A person who knows how to sew gets Tk 1,200. When it is time for us to marry and people ask what we do, it will feel good to tell them we work in a garment factory instead of as a domestic helper".

"Wages are much higher than brickchipping... we can eat on time... wages increase with experience... and we don't have to work under the sun like brickchipping."

These young women recognise that there are hazards in garment work, but they see this as preferable to their current situation. A domestic worker commented:

"The floor manager and others might take money but they don't hit you like when working as a domestic helper."

Another said:

"In the garment factory there are times when you are scolded. But that is to help you learn the skill. Whereas in domestic helping after working so hard they beat us and verbally abuse us not for our own good."

Conclusion

Young people are aware of a range of children's occupations and they are able to reason about which is best in terms of such factors as relative income, security, safety, hazard, exploitation, etc. Despite their awareness of the problems they face, most groups tend to rank their own occupation more favourably than other occupations. This was less true for girls' groups (especially the sex workers in Ethiopia) indicating their low status and self-esteem. In Bangladesh, girls working in brickchipping or as domestic helpers viewed garment manufacturing as one of the best kinds of work.

Taking into account these young people's perspectives of the work opportunities available to them - their hazards, their costs and their benefits - is especially significant in the context of international intervention to eliminate working environments that are viewed as harmful and exploitative to children. The Bangladesh garment industry, has been a focus of these efforts. Ironically, the very occupation the girls in the study favour is the one from which they have been excluded. The threat of an international boycott in 1993 forced manufacturers to exclude large numbers of children from their factories. When an ILO-Unicef study followed-up the children excluded from garment manufacture, they found that none had subsequently attended school, and many were engaged in more hazardous and exploitative occupations, including brickchipping and domestic service (cited by White, 1996, p 833). The problem is particularly acute for these groups of girls, for whom there are few work choices.

A similar study carried out amongst girls under 15 years old dismissed from a textile factory in Morocco has demonstrated the way children's welfare can be inadvertently worsened (Zalami, 1997). In this case, international media-led action ostensibly intended to 'protect them' from exploitation was implemented without reference to the broader context of their lives and without being part of a comprehensive programme of measures to enhance their status, opportunities and welfare. The importance of taking account of the broader context of working children's lives, is elaborated in the chapters that follow, where children talk more about their work and about school.

Chapter 5:
Work - the 'bad things' and the 'good things'

Introduction

In the next three chapters we ask about children's views on their work, and how these views compare with attitudes to schooling. One of the most striking findings (elaborated in chapter 7) is that most working children in this study do not see attending school as a simple solution to the problems they face in their work, in the way that much of the current debate tends to assume. When asked what would be best for them in their present circumstances, 77% of the 300 children in the study choose the option of combining work with school, while 11% saw 'work only' as the only option. Only 12% of study participants judged 'school only' to be the best option. While some variation was found between specific occupations, this overall tendency to favour school and work was remarkably consistent across all four local studies as well as for girls and boys. While international policy is framed in terms of negative impacts of work and positive impacts of school, young people themselves hold a more balanced view. Chapter 3 has already explored the way children's awareness of their circumstances shapes their views on the work they have to do. This chapter looks more directly at what it is that they see as harmful about their work, as well as about any positive benefits. In Chapter 6 we explore the benefits and costs of schooling, before returning to children's judgements about the balance between work and school in Chapter 7.

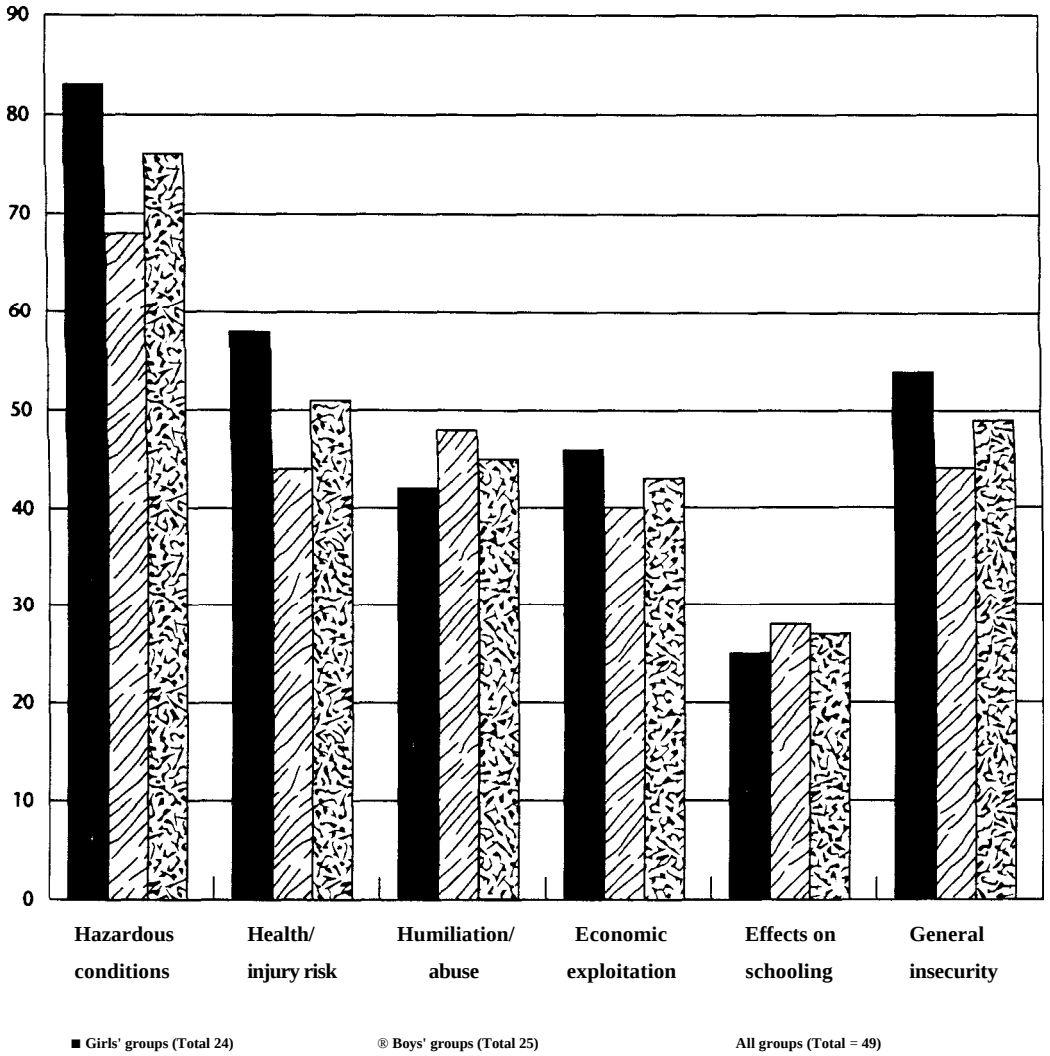
Activity 4

Activity 4 of *The Children's Perspectives Protocol* was divided into three parts. Activities 4.1 and 4.2 asked participants to comment on positive and negative aspects of school and work. A picture card was prepared by local investigators to depict `school' and the `occupation' of the group in question. Cards were also prepared of a 'happy face' and a 'sad face'. First, the card of the children's occupation was placed on the floor, with the `happy face' on one side, and the `sad face' on the other side. Young people were asked about the good things about being a working child, the things that made them feel happy, pleased, proud and confident. They were then asked about the bad things about their work, the things that make them sad, frightened, angry and bored. Once the young people's ideas had been fully explored, the 'work' card was replaced by the `school' card, and the procedure repeated, asking first about good things, and then about bad things. The final part of Activity 4 invited participants to compare school with work. This activity generated numerous statements from the participants, which have been coded into major themes.

'Bad' things about work

Figure 5.1 summarises children's comments into major themes, and indicates the percentage of groups in which each of these themes was mentioned. Children are well aware of many the difficulties they face in their work. There are many consistent comments about the physical hazards of work, economic exploitation, as well as about abuse and humiliation. The significance of these issues varies according to children's gender and occupation, as elaborated below.

Figure 5.1 "Bad things" about work: major themes in girls' and boys' groups



Hazardous working conditions

Hazardous working conditions was the most commonly mentioned theme, by 76% of all the groups. The girls' groups experienced this as an issue even more consistently than the boys - it was mentioned by 83% of the girls' groups. For some groups the physical conditions of work was the major concern, for example amongst these boys mining for lead in Guatemala:

"We get tired because we have to crawl when we work... we have to come out

bent over carrying the load. We can't stand up because then we hit our heads on the rock ... we have to use a light, a lamp that we strap to our foreheads."

The girls and boys who fish in the Philippines were also aware of the hardship they face:

"Seawater is salty.... jellyfish is itchy... our bodies ache.... it's cold in the sea... it's hot on the seashore."

For a sex worker in Addis Ababa, it was life on the streets at night that felt tough:

"I was once on the street, it was very cold that night. I didn't get a customer so I cried."

For many occupations, the problem is not so much about physical conditions as about fatigue, monotony and the constant demands for more work to be done. The first quote comes from embroidery workers in Bangladesh. The second comes from children who make fireworks in Guatemala:

"It is hard working on winter nights. Nights are long. That is why just by working for an hour we feel sleepy... When there is a power cut, *Mohajon* (employer) makes us work till midnight."

"I get bored and tired of always sitting down or standing up, we hardly move from the same place."

Young people in farmwork also spoke about the unremitting labour involved, as here in Guatemala and Bangladesh:

"We have to walk long distances with the load of already picked cardamom."

"I feel very bad when before completing one work, someone sends me to some other work."

Being left to work at home can also be tedious, as this girl in Nicaragua said: "When you are all by yourself, having to do all the domestic chores is boring"

Health or injury risk

Health or injury risks are closely related to conditions of work, mentioned by 51% of the groups. Once again this is raised as an issue by more girls' than boys' groups (58% versus 44%), especially in agriculture, fishing, brickchipping, mining and fireworks manufacture.

In the Philippines, young girls (7-10 years old) working in the sugar plantations listed some of the problems they face:

"We work with barefoot and the ground is hot ...The tools are sharp... The soil is hard to break... I get scratches... I get itchy."

A boy fishing in The Philippines described his experiences:

"Our ears bleed... we are hurt by the spines of crabs, shells, fish, bamboo... there are sharks."

Some participants were so familiar with these hazards, that they took them for

granted as part of growing-up and becoming skilful:

"I hurt myself with a scythe. But I think this is a natural part of growing-up" A farm labourer in Bangladesh described a specific injury:

"Once, nails from my four fingers were plucked by the sickle as I was cutting sugar cane. I was out of work for four months."

A brickchipper girl in Bangladesh described the risk of eye-injuries, as well as the affects of the heat:

"It is very painful when a splinter from the brick gets into the eyes. One can turn blind... I don't like sitting under the sun without a shade and do brickchipping. My head spins. I often get fever at night. Many people die working under the sun."

A boy making fireworks in Guatemala spoke of the constant threat of a serious accident:

"In our work there have been many accidents.... boys and girls have died... this scares us."

Humiliation, ill treatment and abuse

While young people in this study are aware of many of the hazards in their work, a recurring theme is not so much about the work itself but about the way they are treated. Children feel vulnerable to those with greater power and authority. They talk about people who bully, extort money, make unreasonable demands, mislead them, ridicule them, humiliate them, beat them or in other ways abuse them. -Sources of abuse include employers, customers, police, members of the public and other children. Children's experiences were strongly shaped by their gender and **TV** the circumstances of their work.

Newspaper sellers in Ethiopia talked about their difficulties:

"Adults read the newspaper and give it back without paying... Police chase us away from selling on the streets... Some drivers go off with our newspaper when the traffic lights change to green. This especially happens when the police come towards us and we have to run without collecting our money. Big boys ask us to give them money... Guards don't let us sell in restaurants or bars... The police always read the newspaper without paying.",

A group of street vendors in Nicaragua had similar experiences:

'If we try to sell inside a bus, the bus drivers punch us, kick us and pull our hair... Police officers also mistreat us... they hit, kick and chase us."

Domestic workers (girls) felt highly vulnerable to ill-treatment by employers. Comments from groups in the Philippines included:}

'They shout at me and I am always reprimanded... I work until midnight. I

cannot rest or go out... The dog's food is better than mine... My employer controls my life."

This feeling of powerlessness, virtual enslavement, was expressed forcefully by one of the domestics in Bangladesh:

"Whenever *bibi saheb* (employer) is going out, she locks me in from the outside, as if I'm going to steal everything in their house."

The plight of some girls is made worse by unreasonable demands, as described by this girl in Dhaka, Bangladesh who is expected to care for a disabled child:

"I feel very bad when they hit me... if the disabled girl falls when I can't hold her properly."

The problem for these domestic helpers in Bangladesh isn't just about ill-treatment. It is also about being made to feel ashamed for being a poor working child.

"I feel terrible when visitors in *bibi saheb's* (employer's) house is always scolding me... Because we are poor, *bibi saheb is* always saying: 'stand away from me. Don't touch my clothes'. As if our body is smeared with filth."

Confined within the private space of their employer's home, often far distant from family or other sources of support, domestic workers are also highly vulnerable to sexual abuse, as witnessed by these girls in Bangladesh and The Philip
pines:

"If there is an adult male in the house they try to do `bad' things." "The brother of my employer has made sexual advances on me."

Street work is also a context where children can feel vulnerable. Boys and girls working as vendors, porters or shoeshine all described incidents of humiliation, intimidation and abuse, as illustrated by these comments from Bangladesh, El Salvador and Nicaragua:

"When at times a customer is kind and gives us a fruit while (she is) buying some, we feel good. But as soon as the customer is out of sight, the fruit seller will snatch it away from our hands and accuse us of stealing."

"Gangs (of older youths) take money from the children... they've never taken from me but I've seen it."
"Men harass you and that is when they rape you."

For a shoeshine boy working on the streets of Addis Ababa, the police were seen as part of the problem:

"We don't feel protected from thieves, or from the police."

Intimidation and abuse doesn't just come from adults. It also comes from other children. A market boy in Nicaragua was concerned about the dangerous habits that street workers could get forced into:

"Some sniff glue... they mess up other children by tying them up and putting glue to their nose."

Participants were upset if they were mocked by their peers, as experienced by this shoeshine boy in Addis Ababa:

> "I feel ashamed when some people verbally abuse me. I sometimes hide myself when I see my class mates while I clean shoes."

A plantation worker in The Philippines had similar experiences:

> "I am ashamed because they call me *'sacada'* (sugar plantation worker)."

Feeling ashamed for having to work is not an effect of work, although the psychological damage is immense. It is a consequence of the way working children are ill treated and stigmatised within society, including by more privileged peers. Fishing girls in The Philippines always felt upset by this:

> "(Other girls) jeer at us because we carry filthy fish .....They shouldn't do that because I will fight back ..... I cannot tell my parents about it because my father usually scolds me for not fighting back, although I wanted to."

The sex workers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia present a very distinct set of issues within this study, because of their stigmatised status. They are especially vulnerable to abuse, from all quarters. The greatest risk was at the hands of their customers, as two comments illustrate:

> "Once a man took me to a hotel. He woke up early in the morning and took my money, clothes, leaving me there with my underclothes only."

> "Men beat us when we refuse their various sexual demands... several men might want to have group sex... some men don't pay us money... or if we go to their room, they take our money and drive us out into the forest and leave us there in the middle of the night."

One of the problems for many young sex workers in this study is their lack of support networks, other than from each other. One spoke of the way she was treated by her landlady:

> "One day I slept the whole day. I did not get `busy' so my landlady began to insult me. (She shouted) `Why don't you go and work. Do you think my house is a pension (hotel)?"

Most disturbing is this account of an incident where policemen were described as perpetrators of abuse:

> "The abuse by the policemen was when they picked us up from the street... one time a customer, just for fun and hate, took us outside the city in the forest during the night... when the police found us we were raped."

Economic exploitation

For just under half the groups, feelings of humiliation are also provoked by their experience of economic exploitation. Young people complain about being deprived of earnings, their earnings are delayed, or they are cheated out of what they feel they deserve. The porters in Bangladesh were always worried about how much their customer will pay:

"Some people make us carry very heavy loads on our heads and move from one shop to another for hours, bargaining. After that when they pay me low, I get tears in my eyes. Many times I have returned their money, saying I can do without that amount."

For girls in agricultural work in The Philippines and Guatemala, a sense of unfair treatment was expressed: "We are not given a just wage... at times, we are promised to be paid at a later time."

"We work the same but men get paid more."

Farm workers in Bangladesh had their own story to tell:

"There are some *gerestho* (landowners) who are bad. Even when our working time is over they say `there is still time, why don't you mend the fence properly.' They usually delay in paying our weekly wages."

Street vendors and market workers in Nicaragua feel especially vulnerable to exploitation because they are female:

"When we don't sell enough, or if something goes missing the owners take away some of our profit... The owners never lose... They call us 'bloody girls' or `idiot girls'."

For boys working in weaving and embroidering in the Bangladesh informal sector, the issue is more about linking the wages to their productivity:

"When the work is supposed to be finished within a given time, our employer threatens us that he won't pay us if we don't complete the work on time."

"We feel very bad when our employer makes excuses and delays our payment."

Effects on schooling

Whether young people saw their work as interfering with school depended on their local situation. In the Central American study, virtually all the children were in school. But only 2 of the groups suggested their work was having harmful effects on their schooling. Most felt able to reconcile work with school demands. In the Bangladesh study, effects of work on school wasn't an issue either, but for quite different reasons. Very few children were -attending school, and only 2 groups of boys referred to this as an issue. For example a-boy working, as a market porter recognised that the necessity of work had denied him the possibility to attend school:

"Why did I have to leave school and work so hard? I feel angry about such things."

As already noted in Chapter 3, the pressures of reconciling work with school attendance and performance was most keenly felt by young people in The Philippines, in all occupations studied. For a domestic worker, taking work in her employer's house had meant quitting school:

"It is pitiful because I cannot continue my studies."

Most comments from participants in The Philippines were about trying to combine work with school, in a context where they were expected to attend full-time (morning and afternoon) school:

"We are always late in school... our teachers don't heed us because we are always absent."

"I should be concentrating on school, not work only... even when I am tired I must go to school."

"It disturbs our studies."

General insecurity

Many other themes mentioned in the groups expressed the insecurity of their situation, their social isolation and their limited future prospects. For domestic workers who have left their families, feelings of loneliness and lack of support were mentioned.

"I have no one to call Mama/Papa when I get sick... I am away from my family, we are not together... I cannot talk freely to other people and my friends... I am not familiar with the place."

A porter in Bangladesh felt both sad and angry about his circumstances:

"Why did my father die when I was young? Why did I have to leave home and work so hard? I feel angry about such things."

A shoeshine boy referred to insecurity of not knowing whether they would make enough money, feelings that were echoed by a *kollo* snack vendor:

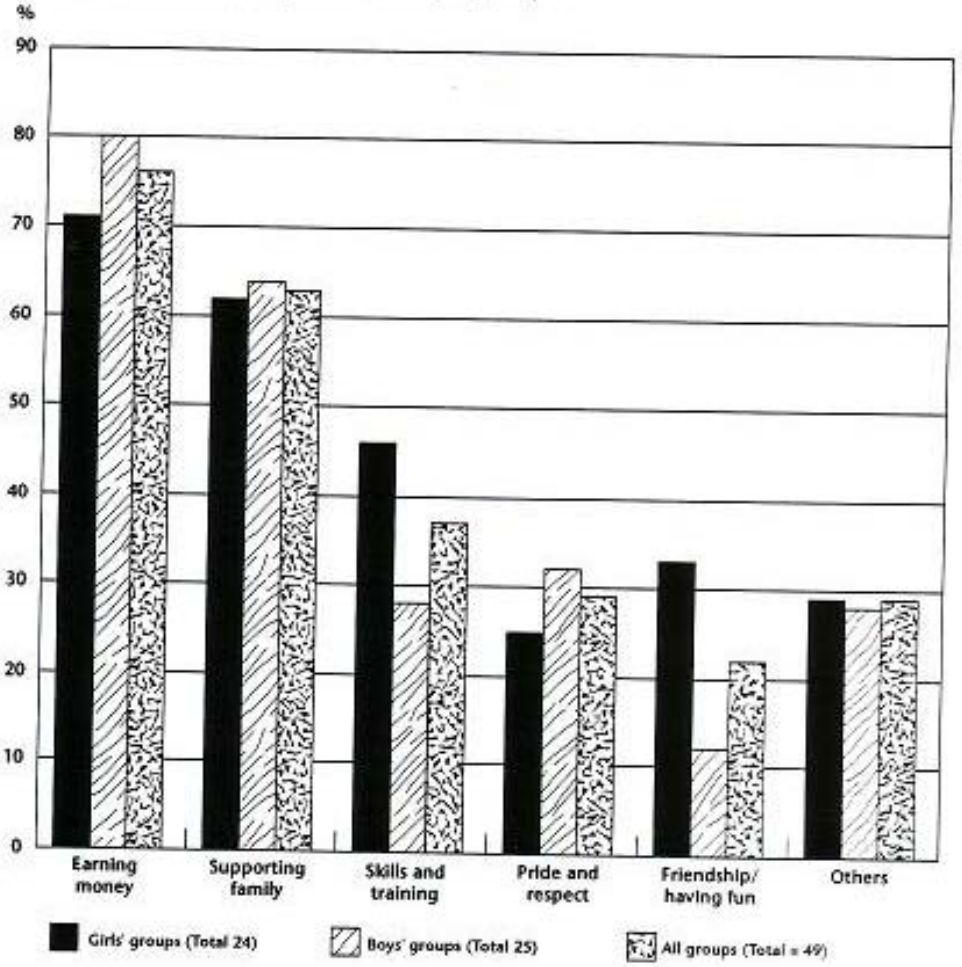
"I feel bad when I go home empty handed, especially on a rainy day. On a rainy day, people don't want their shoes cleaned."

"I feel bad when I haven't made enough money to *buy kollo* for the next day's selling."

'Good' things about work

The quotations above illustrate that these young people were articulate in expressing their feelings about the effects of their work as well as the indirect effects of the way they were treated by employers, customers and peers. But they were also dear about ways in which work brought benefits, (Figure 5.2). Most comments related to the economic benefits of work, and in many cases the necessity of working to cover basic food, clothing and school costs (not for consumer goods and personal luxuries). 63% of groups included being able to provide economic support to their family as one of the good things about work. Besides these economic benefits, three other main themes were mentioned: to do with skills training**,** independence and self-esteem and to do with social relationships.

Figure 5.2 "Good things" about work: major themes in girls' and boys' groups



Earning money

A domestic worker and a brickchipper in Bangladesh summed up the economic benefits:

"In our life money is the most important thing."

"When I have money in my hand I feel secure."

For a girl in Nicaragua, the possibility of being economically independent was what mattered:

"I can support myself from my work without needing anybody else's help."

For the most part these young people's earnings were not for personal luxury items, but for meeting basic needs that their families would be unable to afford, as in these examples from Guatemala and The Philippines:

"Having money to spend... having money to save... we can buy clothes... we can buy shoes."

"I can buy rice, meat, clothes, shoes, underwear, uniforms, bag, socks."
"You give money to your mom, to buy rice, beans and sugar."

A common theme referred to earning money in order to pay for the costs of schooling. A boy making fireworks in Guatemala commented:

"We buy shoes and clothes that our parents can't give us, we also buy notebooks, books and pencils for our studies."

A girl in fishing work in The Philippines made a similar point: "If I have school projects, I can pay for them."

Once these costs were covered, a major benefit for a brickchipper and a porter in Bangladesh was being able to keep a little of their earnings for themselves:

"By doing this I can buy clothes and trinkets for myself with my own earnings."

"The best time is on the eve of *Eid* when we earn more than Tk 100. With money, I can watch movies, buy clothes for myself and eat whatever I like."

Not all young people earned money directly. For some the benefits were through being paid in kind, as for this domestic in Bangladesh:

"If I work I can get food and clothes. It's nice when *bibi saheb* offers us food in a nice way."

Supporting family

In most groups earning money was closely linked to supporting their family. A newspaper vendor on the streets of Addis Ababa said:

"I give money to my parents and they are very happy."

This sentiment was repeated many times over, as in these examples from Bangladesh, Guatemala and The Philippines:

"My mother is happy when I am able to pay for the daily expenses of my family."
"We help our parents with household expenses."
"I can give money to brothers/sisters."
"My grandmother loves me more because I help her."

Skills and training

While participants were most aware of the economic benefits of working, work was also seen as developing strength and skills, especially amongst girls' groups (46%). As a girl working in fishing in The Philippines said:

"I learn to be industrious and helpful... I am being trained for the future when others will get and employ me."

Others in the same occupation said:

"One develops endurance if one constantly works... a working child is better than those not working. He is more productive." "It makes us strong and develop broad muscles."

In the same country, boys in farm work argued:

"I become masculado (muscleman) because I carry a lot of things."

"We will learn how to work... be trained with the skills of a farmer... follow the good traits of our parents."

In El Salvador, a market girl also felt her work was good preparation for a tough life:

"We learn to defend ourselves... because this way we survive in life."

Several other young people were even more reflective about working hard now in order to insure their future:

"I learn how to work young so that when I get married I can already feed my family."

"If we work now we won't suffer when we are big." "I will not be dependent for money on anyone."

Pride and respect

29% of groups also saw benefits in terms of the pride and self-esteem of a job well done. A shoeshine boy in Addis Ababa expressed his feelings:

"We like it when we do excellent work and the client pays us money... when a client waits for us when we are busy despite the attempts by other shoeshiners to take them away."

Similar emphasis on the value of feeling respected was expressed by a porter in Dhaka:

"When madam behaves nicely with me, addresses me as a son and pays me more."

Or as a domestic put it:

"It feels good when everyone appreciates me."

Friendship/having fun

The friendships and social support felt amongst children working together was much more often mentioned by girls' than boys' groups (eight groups versus three groups). For a brickchipper, working was a social experience:

"It gives me the chance to sit alongside my friends and work as well as chat. It keeps me happy and I can break a lot of bricks."

Friends were also important in times of crisis, as a girl snack seller in Ethiopia described:

"I feel happy... if I do not have any money to buy kollo for selling... and my friend loans me money."

Despite the difficulties of their circumstances, young people also talked about having fun. The same snack vendors in Ethiopia talked about when they visit the bars:

"I feel happy when I get the chance to watch TV in bars and also sell... When I see a person with his money being drunk and loosing himself I laugh... We feel happy when a customer comes smiling."

Even the sex workers in Addis Ababa spoke of the good times:

"Men entertain us by buying us drinks, good food and drive us round the city... I met a Sudanese, we used to live together and he used to give me a lot of money. I was so happy."

And in The Philippines a young girl thought the plantation was her playground, while a boy enjoyed the challenge of working with his father:

"I can play while working. Cutting canes is fun."

"I enjoy working with my father, especially when we climb the mountain to gather firewood."

Even the chore of having to fetch water could bring a bonus, as amongst farm workers in El Salvador:

"Going to get water is fun because we go to the river and have fun at the well."

Conclusion

International efforts to combat child labour inevitably concentrate on the harmful effects of work, for example on the damage to physical and psychological health of children in hazardous industries, the risks of violence and abuse to domestic workers, etc. (ILO, 1996, Chapter 1). When the problem is framed as being about 'hazard', interventions that eradicate harmful work from children's lives seem appropriate. But work is not a physical and psychological toxin, in this simple sense. A more complete picture of 'the problem' emerges from talking with working children themselves, who also recognise many of the hazards, but are sustained by beliefs about the necessity of their work and the value it brings to themselves and their family. International opinion may judge these children to be misguided. But intervention must start from children's feelings as well as expert knowledge and public pressure.

Asked about 'bad things' about work, children's perspectives confirmed many official concerns. 75% of groups complained about the dangerous conditions in which they work, their fatigue from carrying heavy loads, or from many hours of labour. 50% of groups made reference to specific injuries, or the danger of accidents. It is important to note that these concerns were expressed by even more

girls' than boys' groups. Vulnerability to ill-treatment, humiliation and abuse was also a source of anxiety to around 40% of groups, although the source of ill-treatment varied by occupation. Domestic workers were most vulnerable to their employers, sex workers to their customers, and street workers sometimes also at risk from their peers. Economic exploitation was another regular complaint from around 40% of groups. Finally detrimental effects of work on school was an issue for those groups struggling to reconcile demands that they do well in both areas of their lives.

Asked about the 'good things' about work, children's perspectives drew attention to less widely discussed dimensions of the issue. The benefit of work to 76% of groups is about earning money, which ensures survival, security, food to eat, clothes to wear, helps pay for school. But earning money isn't only or even mainly about personal benefit. 63% of groups viewed their work as about supporting their family. Their earnings help pay for household expenses, medical costs, making sure there's enough food for little brothers and sisters etc. While poverty, and the necessity of contributing to the family purse most consistently motivates children's work, many groups could also see other benefits from what they do. Around 25% of groups felt pride in the work they do and valued the friendships and solidarity of working alongside others. Groups also referred to the skills they learn, the way work prepares them for the future, (comments more frequently heard in girls' than boys' groups).

In short, this activity revealed a wide range of issues that shape children's perspectives on their work. In general, working children don't appear to view their labours as a harmful experience that can simply be eradicated. Of course, they would wish for many improvements in their working lives, and in their family and economic circumstances. But they are also realistic about the current pressures that make their work so necessary, and in some cases positively value the opportunities for relative security, training and camaraderie.

Finally, these generalisations are based on groups of working children sharing their experiences with a sympathetic fieldworker, through games and activities carried out in a relaxed atmosphere. They reflect children's feelings about their work, and their willingness to voice their concerns. The quotations indicate the range of comments made, but they are by no means exhaustive. The statistics in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 offer an approximate indicator of the importance of child work themes to whole groups of children. Additional research might profitably

' seek-out more fine-grained understanding of individual children's perspectives on the precise impact of these potential hazards and benefits in their lives, preferably within a longer term developmental perspective. Despite the limitations of this broad-based survey of children's perspectives, one lesson is quite clear. As 'insiders', what children see as hazardous or benign, harmful or valuable, exploitative or educative, may not always be the same as how 'outsiders' view these issues. Children's perspectives are not definitive any more than anyone else's perspectives. But there is a strong case for paying very close attention to how children feel about their situation, when deciding how best to enhance their best interests. The gulf that can exist between different stakeholders' perspectives is revealed

even more clearly in the next chapter on working children's experiences of schooling.

Chapter 6:
School - the 'good things' and the 'bad things'

In much of the debate about the detrimental effects of work, a hidden comparison is being made, with the presumed benefits of school. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, this is explicit in a juxtaposition between Article 32 which asserts that it is part of children's rights to be prevented from doing 'harmful' work, and Article 28 which states with equal certainty that all children should be required to attend primary school:

> "States Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall in particular:
> (a) Make primary education compulsory and free to all..."
> (extract from UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28, my emphasis).

It is taken for granted that school will be a positive experience and that it will benefit children's long term prospects. Acknowledging that many schools may be poorly resourced and of low quality, the authors of the 'State of the World's Children' were still in no doubt about the role of education:

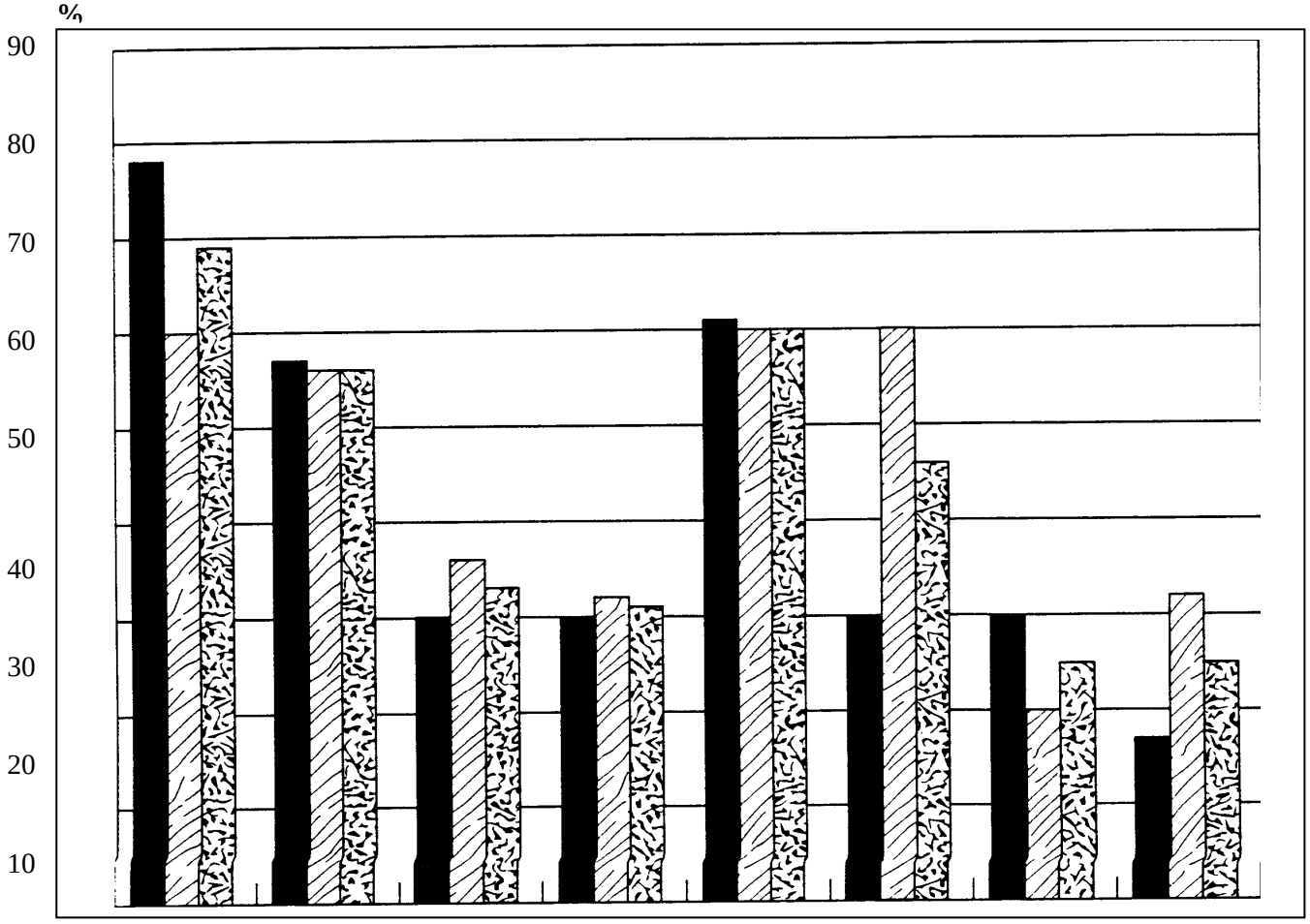
> "Education is one of the keys that will unlock the prison cell of hazardous labour in which so many children are confined... Education helps a child develop cognitively, emotionally and socially and it is an area often gravely jeopardized by child labour."
> (Unicef, 1997)

By asking young people in this study about their experiences of school as well as work, we were able to gain a more realistic perspective on these issues, from the consumers' point of view. Just as young people in this study talk about the benefits as well as the hazards in their work, so they talk about negative as well as positive aspects of schooling. As for work, young people's comments about school were strongly shaped by their circumstances. Some groups were attending school more or less full-time, and fitting-in their work outside school hours and during vacations (especially in The Philippines). In other settings children attended part-time school. There were also participants with little or no experience of school, at best having dropped out during the early grades (as amongst groups in Bangladesh). Despite their varied experience of school, the young participants in this study shared much in common in their beliefs about both 'good' and 'bad' features.

'Good things' about school

In Figure 6.1 replies to questions about the `good things about school' have been grouped into broad themes about learning, achievement, and work prospects as well as about social relationships and self-esteem.

Figure 6.1 "Good things" about school: major themes in girls' and boys' groups



Literacy and numeracy

Not surprisingly, the value of literacy and numeracy was the most consistent theme, mentioned even more frequently amongst girls' than boys' groups (78% versus 60%). For example, a farm work girl in Guatemala said:

"We learn to read and write in order to defend ourselves in life."

In The Philippines a similar sentiment was expressed:

"I will not become ignorant or illiterate. I learn many things."

These young people were all attending school. This was not so for a domestic worker in Bangladesh, who regretted her lack of education:

"If I could have gone to school I could read everything and be able to write letters to my parents from wherever I am."

Improved work prospects

Only 56% of the groups in this study referred to the theme of improved job prospects as one of the benefits of school. Four participants from The Philippines illustrate the range of views:

> "School prepares us for the future. We learn a lot from our teachers, not like some of our parents who cannot read or write."

> "I want to learn more. I want to raise our standard of living." "I can escape from the work on the farm."

> "I will not be just a househelper for life... I can be hired in a decent office... I can go far to other lands... I will not be poor forever."

A boy in fireworks manufacture in Guatemala was reflective about the best way to improve the prospects for his own children:

> "Study helps us to improve ourselves and obtain a better job in which we make more money, because then our children will not suffer nor have to go to work."

School achievements etc.

Participants in one third of the groups commented on school as a positive experience in terms of achievements. For example, a newspaper vendor in Addis Ababa commented:

> "I am happy when I get a good result in class... I like school because I have never yet repeated in the same grade."

A porter in Bangladesh concentrated on other kinds of achievement:

> "When I win in any school games I feel happy."

In several contexts, young people referred to the pride and recognition that would follow on from school success, as here in Ethiopia, Bangladesh and The Philippines:

> "Answering the teacher's question... to pass an exam with good results... to be first in class."

> "It feels good to pass an examination because everyone around appreciates you."
> "It feels good to get high grades."

Learning skills and discipline

For some groups, the emphasis was on specific skills that they felt they could learn in school. The following illustrate the range:

> "We learn the *`castilla"'* (Spanish, which enables them to work with the rest of the mestizo society in Guatemala that does not speak *Kekch'i)*

> "We learn to do accounts."

"I know how to sew, knit, cook and other housechores."

Others valued the discipline and moral guidance that school could offer:

"We learn good manners... are courteous to older people... we stay away from drugs, do not steal or smoke cigarettes."

"Manners will be more refined... have discipline."

"To be well-mannered... to be humble... to be honest... we learn not to be vulgar."

Peer relationships

The second most commonly mentioned category of good things about school (by 60% groups) was about making friends, including the possibility of mixing with more fortunate children on equal terms. This was a reality for many young people in Guatemala, The Philippines and Ethiopia:

"I like September because it is the time I meet my friends."
"We learn not to discriminate."

"(School is good because)... schoolmates help you and lend you things."

For sex workers in Ethiopia, these comments were more wishful:

"To be equal with others... going to school with friends... being with friends singing."

A similar hope was expressed by a porter in Bangladesh, also not able to attend school:

"Nobody comes to know you are poor, everyone mixes like brothers."

Being able to play

Nearly half the groups viewed school as a rare opportunity to play with their friends but with a clear gender difference. Boys' groups talk about ball games and swimming in these examples from Guatemala, El Salvador and Ethiopia:

"At recess I can play ball, run, play tag with my classmates."

"I have time to play ball with my friends, because I don't have time to play during my working hours."

"We have school trips, we got to the river to bathe... it's lots of fun."

Liking and pleasing teacher

Establishing positive relationships with teachers was an important source of support for nearly half the groups:

"They guide us, love us, support us and take care of us, they teach us new things."

to us in the streets.. there are many kidnappings."

"We only have one teacher and he is very good, we love him very much because he respects us and advises us."

Gaining respect/feeling good

Good experiences in school were closely linked in many participant's minds to their self-respect in the community. Two domestic workers make the point. The first combines work with school in The Philippines:

"Wherever I go, people will look up to me with high regard."

A second participant (in Bangladesh) is unable to attend school, but recognises the social esteem that would follow from school achievement:

"If I go to school people around are going to say `see her daughter knows how to read and write' which is going to please my parents."

Other young people in Bangladesh recognise the social status that goes with school attendance, of which they are deprived:

"People appreciate you if you go to school."

"When I do a good result and everyone in the family and neighbourhood praises me."

For some children, exchanging their work clothes for school uniforms was the attraction:

"I want to become a school child because they are clean in their uniforms." "One can wear good clothes and shoes if one goes to school."

'Bad things' about school

Participants were articulate about the benefits (or potential benefits) of school. But they did not see school as an unqualified blessing, as Figure 6.2 makes clear. When asked about the 'bad things' about school, major themes included harsh and humiliating teaching methods, beatings and abuse, feelings of failure, teasing and bullying as well as the costs of schooling and the problem of coping with competing pressures to work.

Humiliation and punishment

Over half the groups spoke about humiliating punishments from teachers. In The Philippines, some young people in fishing work spoke of their teachers as follows:

"(They)... pinch us... throw erasers at us... pull our hair... hit us with big sticks... make us kneel, hands raised and put books over hands."

Another girl in fishing work said:

"If I got zero in the exam, my teacher forced me to eat my test paper, and made me sing in front of the class."

Also in The Philippines, farming children talked of other aspects of malpractice: "Our teachers would hit us, slap us, pinch us... they would threaten us not to reveal (to our parents) what they are doing. If we will they will flunk us in class."

In Guatemala, a girl who makes fireworks said:

> "The teachers scold us... sometimes they hit us with rulers when we don't pay attention."

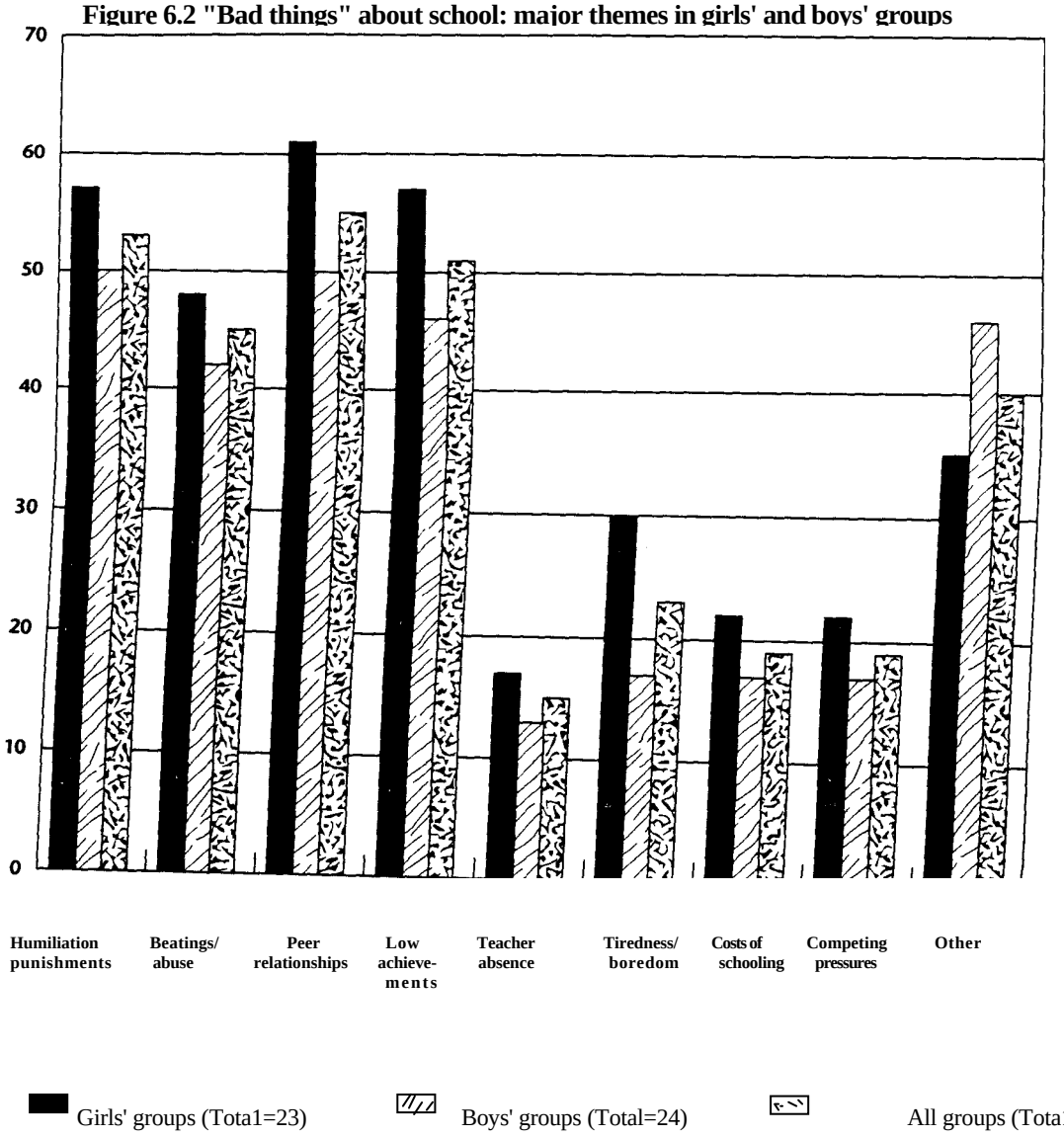
In Bangladesh, a farm worker remembered his experiences before leaving school:

> "We were made to stand on a stool holding our ears."

Beatings/abuse by teachers

It was difficult to establish a clear dividing line between humiliating punishments and the next category, more specific cases of beatings and abuse. Participants in

Figure 6.2 "Bad things" about school: major themes in girls' and boys' groups



45% of the groups spoke of actual or feared teacher behaviour that could be considered abusive. According to these working children, frequent beatings are a major hazard facing children at school. One comment came from a group of farm workers in Bangladesh:

"They beat us with a cane or a bamboo stick on our palms or back... At times they also push our head under a table and hit us on our buttocks."

One possible explanation for why few participants in the study in Bangladesh were attending school was offered by a brickchipper:

"I would have gone to school if the teachers taught me properly instead of beating me."

A snack vendor in Ethiopia described what happened to her:

"When my parents did not buy exercise books, the teacher beat me." In the Philippines, a group of fishing workers reported:

"Our teachers hit us with big sticks."

Another group of boys hinted at sexual abuse:

"Our teachers undress us, genitals exposed."

Girls in the same work reported their experience:

"If we have not done assignments, some of our teachers force us to raise our skirts and they hit our butt."

Peer relationships

While many groups recognised the potential of school as a catalyst for social integration (see above), a student's experience of their peers could be anything but positive. Young people in Nicaragua, Ethiopia and The Philippines describe their humiliation at school:

"Children from richer families tease and insult us by mentioning our work." "Boys bully us in the school compound and outside." "They laughed at me because I have no shoes and I have dirty clothes." "My male classmates kick me when I do not give them what they want."

Low achievement

While children recognise the potential for school achievement as a 'good thing' about school, for many the reality is much less positive. A shoeshine boy in Ethiopia explained many reasons why he was disillusioned with school:

"I feel ashamed when I fail in examinations, when I am not able to answer when a teacher asks, when I repeat in the same grade, when I miss classes, when I am not able to do my homework."

A farm worker in Guatemala also recognised similar problems:

"We feel bad when we don't understand what the teacher teaches us or when we can't do the homework he gives us."

The problem didn't just lie with critical teachers, and low levels of personal confidence. Peers played their part in the process of humiliation:

"My classmates ridiculed me if I got zero in tests or got low grades in my report card.

Teacher absence

Working children cannot be expected to make much progress in school if their teachers don't show up. Absentee teachers was a particular concern for participants from one Guatemalan village, where both groups reported the problem:

"The teacher often doesn't show up to teach classes."

"Teachers often lie to us. They say, we are going to come to school such-and-such a day and then they don't come after all."

A boy in El Salvador also felt frustrated when his teachers didn't show up:

"(It is bad) if the teacher doesn't come, when I have done my homework well."

In The Philippines, a domestic worker claimed that her teachers were extorting money from their students:

"Our teachers get money from us if we do not have assignments."

Tiredness/boredom

Another theme, expressed here by young people in the Philippines engaged in fishing and farming, is that school is boring and makes them lazy:

"Pure schooling make your body unfit. You will get lazy."

"It is tiresome to sit most of the times."

Costs of schooling

The next two themes reflect the problems faced by poor children trying to combine work with school. Participants referred to the direct costs of schooling, compounded by the indirect costs that result from their loss of earnings while in school. This problem was referred to frequently by the groups in The Philippines who may be expected to pay for a daily snack, as well as cover the costs of materials and projects, as well as transport:

"Our teachers ask for many donations from us"

"I cannot earn money... I have not enough money for my school expenses."

"We pay a lot of contributions, even buying mops, floor wax and things. And we have to bring chicken to our principal once in a while."

A similar tension was expressed by groups in Bangladesh:

"When I don't have a pen and ask the teacher to give me one, she says, `can't

you buy one?' and when I tell her my mother has no money, she says, `Why, doesn't your mother work if she has no money?' then I feel hurt."

"In school everyone eats something and I also feel like eating. So when I asked my mother for a small amount (Tk 1) to take to school she used to beat me and send me out to work instead."

Competing pressures

Even if working children manage to cover the costs of schooling, they still face major practical pressures of combining the demands of school with the necessity of work. Some young people commented on the pressure from their families to give priority to their work, as in these comments from Bangladesh and Guatemala:

"Before going to school, my mother asks me to do some work. By the time I complete the work its late for school."

"We don't like to miss school because we have to work."

"Our parents tell us that instead of wasting time in school we should go to work."

For three groups of girls in Bangladesh and Ethiopia, one of the `bad things about school' was the intolerance of teachers to problems of trying to reconcile competing pressures, to get chores done at home, earn money from their work, get homework done, and get to school on time:

"When I used to be late for school because I had to complete my household chores before leaving for school, the teacher used to beat me. She did not listen to what I said."

"I feel very bad when the teacher punishes me because I did not do my homework and I cannot explain the reason why I did not do it."

"Not being able to do homework because of lack of time and the teacher is angry... When we do not finish our homework and are beaten by our teachers, and are not able to explain our problems."

Others

Amongst the less frequently heard comments were these concerns about the practicalities of getting to school:

"To go to school one has to cross a big road and I am scared that I might have an accident."

"School is quite far from home."

Finally, a rare comment from a boy in El Salvador about the poor physical state of his school:

"It is very hot at school... there are few books... there is no water... it is dirty... there is no electricity at the school."

Conclusion

An idealised picture of hazardous and exploitative work versus benign and beneficial school does not match with the perceptions of young people in this study (as summarised in this chapter and in Chapter 5). They do recognise many of the hazards of their work. They are all too well aware of the accidents they risk, and the arduous demands they endure. They are also aware of the benefits of school, in terms of skills they can learn and the potential opportunities school achievement can bring. But it is not sufficient simply to weigh up the costs of work against the benefits of school. Young people in this study have referred to many other factors that they add into their own personal cost-benefit equation. First there are the economic issues. Work brings benefits, despite the problems of being exploited by unscrupulous employers and cheating customers. Depending on children's economic circumstances, work can mean there's enough food to eat, making a contribution to the family income, helping-out more generally at home, and maybe having a little pocket money left over for personal spending. Work also provides some of the money to pay for school. There may be fees to pay, or at least books and uniforms to pay for, transport and snacks to pay for, and other sundry demands to be met. On the other side of the equation, the costs of school are more than just monetary. There are the practical issues of getting to school, the problem of making-up the earnings that have been lost during school hours, and (especially for girls), the additional problem of getting house chores done. These dilemmas aren't just about time and money management. Young people are accountable for their actions, and they have to reconcile competing expectations. Failure to get to school on time, or a day missed because of work affects school progress, risks annoying teachers, and may ultimately mean being kept back in grade. Failure to get to work, or failure to earn enough money, or failure to get the chores done may mean a confrontation with an angry employer or a scolding parent. The quality of these relationships with parents, teachers, employers, peers and others is at the heart of children's thinking about costs and benefits, both of work and of school.

Participants value the friendships they form, the camaraderie of shared (work and playful) activity and the mutual support that these networks bring, both at work and at school. Many enjoy the sense of pride and respect in a job well done, or a school assignment completed. They appreciate praise and recognition when their activities are valued by parents, customers, teachers or employers. For many children, school is a place where young people mix with others on more equal terms than in the rest of their lives, with nice clothes to wear, snacks to eat etc. But school can also feel like a very hostile environment to young people. Most groups participating in this study expressed concern about some aspects of the quality of teaching, the behaviour of teachers or the tedium of school work. Ridicule, scoldings, harsh punishment and beatings were a recurring issue, and in a few cases children felt let down by teachers who they claimed arrived late or didn't show-up at all. Very similar concerns were expressed about work, in terms of the humiliation and abuse that children received at the hands of employers, customers and peers. Domestic workers and sex workers offered the most harrowing accounts of their experiences, but there were plenty of other examples, especially

from young people who make their living as street vendors, shoeshine boys etc. Young peoples' feelings of vulnerability were compounded by the absence of networks of support for working children. In a few cases, police were referred to as part of the problem.

In short, for young people in this study, many features of school life seem benign, compared to the difficulties they face in their working lives. But school is not seen as an unqualified blessing any more than work is seen as an unremitting burden. Many of the issues that concern these young people cut across their experience of work, school and indeed family life. They are about the respect that they are shown, or the ridicule they feel; about being treated humanely, or being cheated, beaten or abused. I began this chapter by drawing attention to the way `work' is framed negatively and `school' positively in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Arguably, from the young people's point of view the Convention would have been more balanced if it had acknowledged these harsh realities by ensuring that children are protected from school as well as work experiences that are `harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development'.

Chapter 7: Hard choices

One of the lessons of this report is that most working children do not see working and studying as alternative life choices. 61% of participants were currently combining their work with either full or part-time school. Nor do they condemn their work and idealise their schooling in the dramatic terms of much of the rhetoric about child labour. In many cases they view the two as interdependent, even as a double-bind, where having to work interferes with schooling, but school has to be paid for by work. In this chapter we take these themes a stage further by asking children to make a hard choice: between 'work' or 'school', or combining 'work and school'.

Activity 4

As part of Activity 4, picture-cards representing 'school' and 'work' were placed side by side. Group participants were asked:

"Which is best for you:

- only going to work/ being a working child;
- only going to school/ being a schoolchild;
- going to work and attending school?"

Group facilitators explained to participants that they should make their judgement based on what is best in their present family circumstances? The aim was for participants to give a realistic assessment of their situation. Participants were then asked to explain their judgement.

For this activity in *The Children's Perspectives Protocol* it was possible to collect the views of individual children in the study. Altogether, complete data was available for 145 boys and 155 girls.

Table 7.1 Which is best for you in your present circumstances?

	All girls n=155 %	All boys n=145 %	All children n=300 %
work only	10	12	11
work and school	75	79	77
school only	15	9	12

Table 7.1 presents overall findings of the study. Combining work and school is the overwhelming preference (77% of participants). These young people recognised the potential benefits of attending school, but they were also aware of the difficulties, both the direct costs, (fees etc.) indirect costs (loss of income) as well as the other negative aspects of schooling discussed in chapter 6. Comparing boys with girls, the pattern is broadly similar, although more girls favour 'only school' (15% girls versus 9% boys).

This overall picture conceals the very considerable variations in children's judgements that are related to local circumstances, availability of schooling and specific occupational groups. A comparison between child workers in Central America, The Philippines, Ethiopia and Bangladesh will illustrate the point (Figure 7.1). In making this comparison it is important to emphasise that this study is not based on systematic sampling of working children, and children's views may not be representative of the wider population in each region.

A feature of children's judgements in Figure 7.1 is the consistency with which combining school with work is favoured as the core option, (between 69% and 79% in each region). Many of these participants did not see them as alternatives. Schooling is desirable, but work is a necessity. Work provides the income to support basic necessities, for self and family, and in many cases makes it possible to afford the additional costs of going to school. Children in all four regions were united in their views, as illustrated by the following examples.

First a farm worker in Bangladesh recognises the importance of trying to combine work with school:

> "It will not do us any good if we just work. We will have to go to school. Learn to write our names. First we have to complete our work and then go to school."

Next two girls in the Philippines make the case that both are essential: "Only the rich could study without working." "Work provides support to schooling."

In Guatemala and The Philippines, two girls working in agriculture elaborate the point:

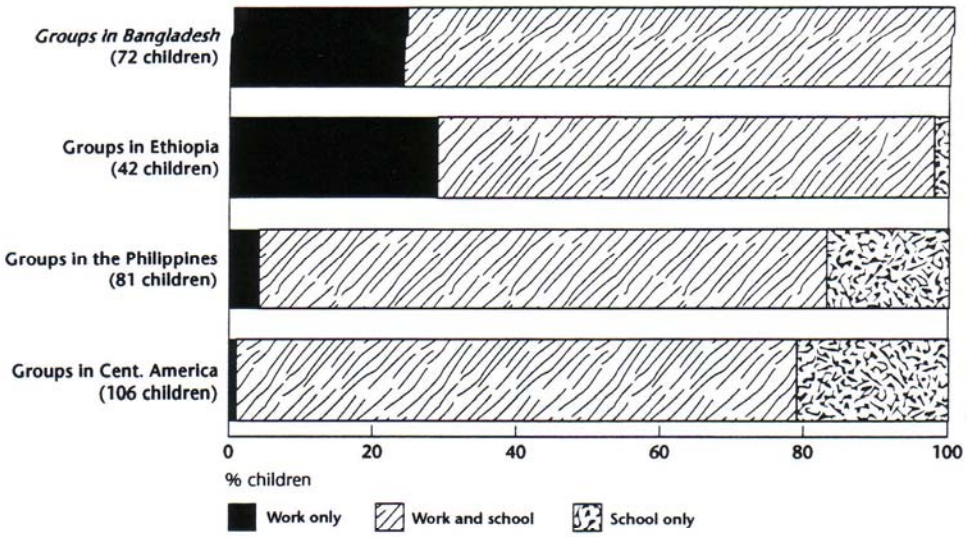
> "We have to help our parents, if we are very poor, we have to help them with the costs of studying and other things that are lacking in the home."
>
> "(Work and school) means I can help my family with my school expenses... my parents will no longer worry about the costs of transport and paying for school projects."

Other participants saw combining work with school in more positive terms, as preferable to childhoods that are dominated just by school:

> "It is the ideal situation. I will work and study to elevate my status in life."
>
> "So we won't become poor financially and mentally... it flatters to be called working student'."

"Isn't it natural for children to work and study at the same time?.. All study

Figure 7.1 Which is best for you in your present circumstances? – comparing four contexts



makes your body weak, and all work makes your mind poor."

These children were all experienced in trying to combine work with school. In Bangladesh, this was still the popular choice amongst children who have little chance of actually attending school. For example a brickchipper said:

> "If we get the chance to do both then it will be best... We can go [to school] at 8.00 in the morning and return home by 10.00 then start brick chipping."

But another young brickchipper expressed a sense of hopelessness about her situation:

> "Even if the situation becomes a thousand times better my step mother will not allow me to go to school."

Domestic workers in Bangladesh expressed similar views. One felt any interest in her education was mainly to do with her prospects for marriage:

> "My mother says, when it will be time for me to be married the groom's family would want to know if I know how to read the Quran, say my prayers and cook, etc., so these are the most important things I should know now."

Another girl in domestic work didn't think we had asked a very meaningful question:

> "If we sit idle for a minute they (employer) scold us, do you think they will let us off for 2-3 hours for school?"

Finally, a porter boy recognised the pressure to give up work in favour of school and warned about the importance of keeping a balance:

> "Even a king's food finishes one day, so it is important to continue working a little."

In summary, 'work and school' is the majority choice in all the regions, although the circumstances of this judgement vary between those who are describing their current reality and those who are expressing an impractical hope. The significance of these differences is confirmed by a close look at the minority choices in Figure 7.1. 'Work only' was chosen by 24% of participants in Bangladesh and by 29% in Ethiopia; very few chose 'school only'. By contrast, 'school only' was the favoured alternative for 17% of participants in The Philippines and 21% in Central America, and very few chose 'work only'. In part, these contrasts are no doubt related to the availability and economic significance of schooling in these countries. (School attendance amongst participants varied, from 8% in Bangladesh, 57% in Ethiopia (part-time), 79% in The Philippines, 58% in Nicaragua and 100% in Guatemala. But other factors also come into play, associated with children's specific, occupational situation. Table 7.2 illustrates the point by contrasting three specific occupations: sex workers in Ethiopia, informal sector workers (weavers and embroiderers) in Bangladesh, and farm workers in Guatemala.

In Central America, more than half the children who chose 'school only' as the best option were from the three farm worker groups in Guatemala. One girl said:

> "It's the best way to become somebody in life, work should be left for after when one is more responsible."

Another made the same point, but was more pessimistic about the reality of her situation:

> "We would like only to study if our parents would back us and our teachers would always turn up to teach classes."

In Bangladesh, where few participants had the opportunity to attend school, none saw 'school only' as a realistic choice, while 24% favoured 'work only'. 12 out of these 17 participants were boys working in the embroidery and sari weaving workshops in the informal sector. As the detailed account in Appendix I of this report indicates, these boys and their families were committed to long working hours that would make schooling impractical:

> "Considering our present family situation we have no choice but to work now.. *Mohajon will* not allow us to take a few hours off for studies... After working the whole day, I don't feel like coming home and start studying. I will not be able to concentrate."

The situation of sex workers offers the strongest example of the way an occupational situation constrains working children's options. These young people feel their occupation stigmatises them and makes attending school impossible. All favoured 'only work'. One emphasised the practical problems:

> "It is impossible to both go to school and work as a prostitute. We stay outside late in the evening and have to sleep during the day. If we want to go to school we have to change our occupation."

Another was more concerned with the social stigma:

> "School and work will not go together because if we go to school as well as work, at school students and teachers will insult us and abuse us and so we cannot attend."

Table 7.2 Which is best for you in your present circumstances? A comparison of specific occupations

	Sex workers (Ethiopia) Total = 12 girls	informal sector (Bangladesh) Total = 13 boys	Farming (Guatemala) Total = 18 boys and girls
work only	12	10	0
work and school	0	3	7
school only		0	11

Conclusion

Young people in these groups are aware of their circumstances, and consider the options available to them. 'Work only' is perceived as a solution by only 11% of participants in this study. This choice comes mainly from workers in specific occupations that they see as incompatible with school, notably the Bangladeshi boys in informal sector workshops, and the Ethiopian sex workers. 'School only' is seen as a solution by 12% of participants. Only 1 of these 36 young people comes from Bangladesh and Ethiopia. This solution appears to be linked to school opportunities, gender and presumably also economic feasibility, and is a popular solution amongst participants in Central America (especially Guatemala), as well as amongst some groups in The Philippines. "Work and school' is seen as the best solution by the majority of children in every country in this study; for very many of these children it reflects their current reality. It seems that these young people value the opportunity of schooling, but they do not see this as an alternative to working, at least not under their present circumstances.

Chapter 8: What if....?

Children's lives are not static. They are constantly changing, as they pass through puberty, acquire new skills and make life transitions in terms of family roles, school attendance and work experiences. Their social environment may also be changing, as circumstances alter and they face new challenges and expectations. For example, new demands may be made by parents; opportunities for school might expand; or regulations about children's work may become more strict. How do young people face such challenges? In particular, how would they feel about any changes to their lives in work and at school? To gauge working children's reactions to these issues, they were posed a series of dilemmas, that centred on changing family expectations and changing work regulations. The first dilemma was about a child faced with conflicting loyalties, between staying on at school and leaving school in order to support parents who want them to work. The second dilemma was about a change in government regulations that would restrict children from working until they reached the age of 15.

Activity 7

For Activity 7 of *The Children's Perspectives Protocol* participants were posed a series of What if... dilemmas facing a working child (often in story form, supported by pictures). They were invited to identify with the child's dilemma, and asked how they should react, what would happen next, who might help. Two dilemmas will be reported here:

Dilemma 1: Parental expectations and school opportunities

The wording of this dilemma varied according to circumstances. In most situations, investigators were working mainly with children attending school. They were asked:

What if... you have a good result at school but your parents want you to quit school and work full-time?

In Bangladesh, where few children were in school, the wording was modified:

What if... a school teacher tries to persuade your parents to send you to school from next month, where books and teaching will be free... but your parents refuse, saying you need to work and earn money?

Dilemma 2: New regulations

What if your government made a new law saying that no children below the age of I S years is allowed to work?

Dilemma 1: Parental expectations and school opportunities

What if... you have a good result at school but your parents want you to quit school and work full-time?

This would be a real dilemma for many participants in the study. The majority combine their work with school, and as we have seen above, the majority favour this combination as the best solution, in their present circumstances. Faced with pressure to leave school altogether (or be denied an opportunity to attend school without charge) how would they react? Young peoples' comments have been grouped under 6 major themes in Table 8.1. Frequently there was disagreement within groups, so their comments have been coded under several themes.

Table 8.1 'What if...?' Reactions to being forced to quit school for full-time work

	Girls' groups	Boys' groups	All groups
	(Total=18)	(Total=21)	(Total=39)
	% groups*	% groups*	% groups*
MAJOR THEMES			
Obey parents	44	57	51
Convince parents	33	52	43
Help from others	50	48	49
Disobey parents	39	43	41
Compromise	50	48	49
Reflective about their situation	33	29	31

' Percentage of groups in which each theme mentioned. Data from groups in Bangladesh, The Philippines, Ethiopia, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Obey parents

Obeying parents was the most frequently recorded response, in half the groups, which indicates the power of parental expectations in these children's lives. All groups in Ethiopia (for which data is available) included this response, perhaps reflecting the cultural emphasis on obedience to parents as well as the economic necessity of work in these children's lives:

"(I would) obey my parents and stop going to school."

Comments from a boy working in the Bangladesh informal sector and a girl domestic

worker in The Philippines illustrate the sense of family loyalty that shaped many young people's thinking:

"But if we are the ones on whom the family is dependant for their survival then we can't neglect that and go to school instead, we will simply continue to work."

"I will stop schooling so my mother will not be too worried about life." **Disobey Parents**

At the other extreme, disobeying parents was seen as a solution in 16 out of the 39 groups for which data is available. Eight of these groups were in The Philippines, where most participants were attending full time school. One fishing boy made clear his commitment to his studies:

"I will still go to school, even without support."

In Ethiopia, a newspaper vendor anticipated a drastic solution, while in Bangladesh, a porter thought he might manage a little deception in order to satisfy his parents' wishes:

"I would run away from home and live with others and continue school."

"I will try my best to earn Tk 40/50 the whole day so that she won't realise that I am taking few hours off from work."

Convince parents

The next two categories of comment were about trying to find ways around the problem, either by personally convincing parents about the benefits of school, or by getting help from others. Nearly twice as many boys' as girls' groups felt able to negotiate with their parents, perhaps reflecting expectations about showing respect, experienced by the girls in this study, (see Chapter 9).

"I will try hard to convince my parents to let me continue my studies."

"Try to explain that it is possible to work and go to school. The shift system is a solution for such a problem."

Help from others

Girls' groups were as resourceful as boys' groups in imagining ways they could enlist the help of wider support networks, to bring pressure to bear on their family. Two examples from the Philippines look for help from teachers or relatives; participants from Bangladesh and Ethiopia thought local officials might help; and one enterprising brickchipper in Bangladesh thought a financial inducement might do the trick:

"I will ask my teachers to encourage my parents to let me pursue my studies."

"I will ask my relatives to convince my parents to allow me to continue my studies."

"I will try to go to the chairman of our area or some influential person and request them to give me work with which I can feed myself, my family and go to school."

"If they still insist that I should work, then I would send a local community leader to my parents so that he could explain to them the value of education."

"The teacher can help us by offering our parents Tk 300 cash every month in exchange for us going to school. Perhaps then they will agree."

Compromise

Many participants saw this as a good solution, in order to try to achieve the best of both worlds - working and attending school - just as most of the participants do at present. This was a popular solution in El Salvador and Nicaragua, but examples are also offered from Bangladesh and The Philippines:

"Go to work but suggest to my family that I could continue studying."

"When everyone in the neighbourhood will be suggesting to them, (parents,) then they will agree saying 'go take suggestion from the master that you will study half-day and work half-day'."

"I will still work on Saturdays/Sundays."

Reflective about situation

Under this heading, a brickchipper in Bangladesh offered a very personal account of how the dilemma has affected her, while two final participants express their indignation that parents could act in this way:

"When my father wanted to send me to school in the village I didn't want to go. And now when I want to go to school my father can't send me due to financial constraints."

"No parents will do that because it's their pride to send their child to school." "God will be angry with such parents."

In summary, most of the young people in this study struggle daily to combine work with school, and their lives are strongly shaped by parental expectations. Identifying with this dilemma was not a problem. While 'obeying parents' was proposed in 51% of groups and disobeying parents was proposed in 41% of groups, many other creative alternatives were suggested, especially trying to convince parents, or seek help to persuade them or trying to find a compromise - to work and go to school.

Dilemma 2: New regulations

What if your government made a new law saying that no children below the age of 15 years are allowed to work?

Dilemma 1 was about being prevented from going to school. Dilemma 2 flipped over the coin, with the problem of what participants would do if children were no longer allowed to work. As before, their responses have been grouped thematically under five main headings, (See Table 8.2).

Table 8.2 'What if...?' Reactions to a new law on age of working

	Girls' groups	**Boys' groups**	All **groups**
	(Total=22)	(Total=24)	(Total=46)
	% groups*	% groups*	% groups*
MAJOR THEMES			
Acceptance	23	33	28
Condition/protest	27	42	35
Defy/evade/crime	73	58	65
Reflective	45	29	37
Other	36	25	30

* Percentage of groups in which each theme mentioned. Data from groups in Bangladesh, The Philippines, Ethiopia, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Acceptance

Comments welcoming, or at least accepting this law were made in only 28% of the groups. Most of these came from The Philippines, especially farm workers and fishing children. This response may indicate these children (who were in full time school) had made a higher investment in education as a route to their future, and saw work as less essential to their and their family's well-being. Three comments illustrate this view:

"We will try not to sell any more."
"Well, we will just follow."
"I'll just continue my studies."

One of the girls in a group of domestic workers in Manila would also accept government action to prohibit young workers:

"I will heed the law... I will wait until I am over 15 and of legal age."

In Guatemala, the only group that appeared to accept the idea of being prevented from working were boys in one of the most hazardous occupations in the study. This group was concerned about the dangers to a younger age group (under 12s), but they didn't want the government to stop them from working:

"We wished that the government would establish new laws so that children under 12 couldn't work in the fireworks factories."

Finally, just one group (of brick-chippers in Bangladesh) felt that a law would prevent their parents making unreasonable demands on them, and enable them to go to school:

"We will be happy if this happens. Then we will only go to school while parents will work. Not having any option, parents will have to work and feed us. Now they don't do that because they see that they have *boro* (older/adult) daughters and sons at home who can work."

Conditional/protest

Comments that expected such a law to be accompanied by other kinds of support for working children and their families were made by 16 of the groups. Most of these were in Bangladesh and Ethiopia (where children felt their income was essential to their livelihood). Some of these comments suggested conditional acceptance of the law, provided that parents were given jobs, or their wages raised, so the families became less dependent on their children's earnings. A news vendor in Addis Ababa put the point bluntly:

"(If there is a law against working) we would ask the government to feed and support us."

In Bangladesh, a domestic worker could imagine an arrangement where she helped out at home, so that her parents could work, provided jobs were available to them:

"In that case, they will have to give jobs to our parents and we will work in our homes."

In the same group, a young domestic worker felt that combining work with school would be much better than a total prohibition on her work:

"We will ask them to give us the opportunity to work and go to school. And if they don't allow us to work then we will ask the government to pay for our food. Otherwise, how will we survive?"

For occupations that require a long apprenticeship, like weaving, the boys couldn't see how a ban would be feasible:

"Government will not pass this kind of law on weaving. If it does then it will have to give a declaration that until we get work it will feed us and send us to school till the age of 20 years."

A group of porters would also like the chance to go to school, but didn't see a law as providing a simple answer:

> "There will not be such a law. If there is one we will ask them `what are we going to eat?' and all the children will go to the government and ask them to give us the opportunity to study in that case... We will go in a procession like one does during *hartal (strike)."*

Other groups, were more pro-active in their comments, suggesting the action they might take to protest against any unilateral imposition of a ban on their work. A brickchipper imagined one scenario:

> "If parents can't feed us then we will go to the Prime Minister's house and sit there. We will tell her that `since you have made such a strict law you feed us because our parents can't feed us and you are not going to let us work, how are we going to survive otherwise?"

As in Bangladesh, boys in Ethiopia anticipated mass protests by children:

> "We will ask the government to feed and support us... demonstrate against the law."

In a few groups, children imagined very drastic measures, such as this commented by a farm labourer:

> "If one is hungry one can do everything, even commit murder. Anyone who stops us from work, we will cut off his head and bury it."

Defiance/evasion/crime

Comments anticipating evasion, defiance or law-breaking were by far the most common, recorded in two thirds of the groups across all countries, and equally common amongst girls' as boys' groups. Here are examples of comments from children in three countries who expected to ignore any law prohibiting their work:

> "We wouldn't accept it because we wouldn't have money for food, clothing and studying."

"We will get down to work and tell them that `you will eat while we starve?'"

> "I will still work, I will not heed the law because the law will not feed my family."

Others felt they could solve the problem by lying about their age:

> "Say that we are 15 so they let us work."

> "I will deceive my age because it is not the law that is going to feed us."

Another very frequently mentioned way of avoiding a law would be to work clandestinely. Vendors in Ethiopia would move off the streets:

> "Sell (the snacks) from home."

Shoeshine boys working on the same streets had similar ideas:

> "Work secretly so that the police wouldn't find us... Change to an occupation that could be done indoors."

The same theme recurred in Guatemala and The Philippines:

> "Work secretly, to have money and buy food, otherwise we starve."

> "I will work secretly or during night or dawn so they will not notice me... I will still work as long as my parents tell me so."

"I will hide if the police will come, then we will work again if they go away."
A few children could imagine resorting to begging and crime as the only way round a prohibition on their work, as here amongst prostitutes in Ethiopia, porters in Bangladesh and farm workers in Guatemala and El Salvador:

> "Beg money."
> "We will pick pockets. We have to survive."
> "Children would take to stealing."

> "Children would be left in the street because they have no money. They would go around stealing or begging for money."

Reflective about their situation

In some cases children were insightful about the responsibilities of a government trying to tackle the problem. The next two comments come from boys working in the informal sector (weaving) in Bangladesh and from farm workers in The Philippines, respectively:

> "If the government cannot help us then it should not make such a law. The one who makes the law must be the one to help us."

> "It would be ideal, but we have no choices because we are poor... Can the law feed us?"

Another group of farm workers (in Bangladesh) were not just concerned for their own welfare. They also realised the impact such a law might have on their employers:

> "If this happens then it will be these *mias* (employers/landlords) who will not get to eat since it is their lands that the *changras* (young boys) work."

Other responses

Amongst `other' responses were those children that looked for support from NGOs or from their families, or that anticipated returning to their villages. The shoeshine boys and prostitutes working on the streets of Addis Ababa make the point:

"Go back home [to rural area they come from] and do agricultural work." "We will go back home by pleading with our families."

Another prostitute in Ethiopia looked towards NGOs for help, as did a domestic worker in The Philippines:

"See support from non governmental organisations." "I will approach people from NGOs."

Finally, one desperate young sex worker in Addis Ababa could foresee a desperate solution:

"I would kill myself."

Conclusion

In conclusion, young people's reaction to being confronted with these two dilemmas is to seek practical, local solutions to the issues they raise. Their identification with a child being pressured to drop school in favour of full-time work leads them to consider every possibility. Family loyalty demands that parental demands be obeyed, and open defiance was suggested in fewer than half the groups. Most young people's thinking revolved around ways of persuading their parents to allow them to continue schooling, or finding a compromise between work and going to school. However, young people's sympathy with a child being forced to work does not mean that they would want to move to the other extreme, of being prevented from working in order to attend full-time school. Replies to Dilemma 2 do not support the idea that working children (in these settings at least) are eager to be protected from their work, through any general legislation designed to eliminate child labour. Less than a third of the groups entertained the thought of accepting any regulations of this kind. Most groups respond to such a suggestion with a mixture of defiance and disbelief. Their first concerns are how lost income will be replaced, unless such a law were part of a larger economic and social programme that would enhance the income of their families, as well as their future prospects. For some, the solution, worryingly, would be to evade the law or go `underground', in ways likely to make it more difficult to regulate exploitative child labour and provide the support these young people seek.

Chapter 9: What matters to parents? What matters to me?

The working children in this study were not working autonomously, with very few exceptions. Even where they worked alone on the streets, or were employed in workshops, their work and income were strongly connected to family expectations and finances. Children may work independently. They may carry significant responsibilities. But most of the children in this study felt strongly accountable to their families. Family members had often initiated them into their work, (as described in Chapter 3) and children's motives for working were often expressed in terms of their contribution to the family purse. We were interested in how far children's working lives are embedded in their family obligations. We asked three kinds of question:

- What do children think matters to their parents? Where does work fit in children's beliefs about their parents expectations?
- What matters to children themselves? Where does work fit in children's self-evaluation?
- What is the relationship between parents' expectations and children's own self evaluation - from children's point of view? Is there any evidence of children placing different value on work and school compared to what they think their parents want?

In this chapter we concentrate mainly on the first two sets of questions, looking first at parental expectations and then at children's self evaluation. Chapter 10 will look in more detail at the third set of questions, especially how children see the relative importance of school and work.

Activity 3

For Activity 3 of the *Children's Perspectives Protocol,* children were first asked to identify who were the most important people in their lives (virtually always parents or close relatives). Secondly, they were asked "What makes them pleased with you?" and then asked "What makes them cross or unhappy with you?". Finally, to find out about children's self evaluation they were asked to comment on an equivalent pair of questions. They were asked: "What makes you feel good about yourself? What are you proud of?" Then they were asked: "What makes you feel bad about yourself? What are you ashamed of?"

What do children think matters to their parents?

Numerous studies have examined parents' expectations of children's development and behaviour, as well as parental views about their own role in socialising their offspring, (e.g. LeVine et al., 1988; Sigel et al., 1992; Goodnow and Collins, 1990;

Greenfield and Hocking, 1994; Harkness and Super, 1996). It is much less common for research to invite children to talk about what they think are their parents' expectations on these same issues. Within the framework of this study, we were particularly interested in how work themes impinge on children's understanding of their parents' expectations. The question was approached through an open-ended technique, which made it possible to see how large 'work' would figure within the wider framework of children's family relationships (see Box - Activity 3, p 89).

Table 9.1 What pleases...?

	Girls' groups	Boys' groups	All groups
	(Total=22)	(Total=22)	(Total=44)
	% groups*	% groups*	% groups*
WORK THEMES	**91**	**91**	**91**
Earning money	50	68	59
Domestic chores	73	55	64
Family care	50	41	45
SCHOOL THEMES	**41**	**41**	**41**
BEHAVIOUR THEMES 86		**73**	**80**
Obedience	73	46	59
Good behaviour	64	50	57

Table 9.2 What displeases...?

	Girls' groups	**Boys' groups**	All groups
	(Total=22)	(Total=22)	(Total=44)
	% groups*	% groups*	% groups*
WORK THEMES	**75**	**75**	**75**
Slacking from work	35	56	48
Failing to do tasks	55	36	53
SCHOOL THEMES	**35**	**35**	**35**
BEHAVIOUR THEMES	**90**	**95**	**93**
Disobedience	75	70	73
Bad behaviour	50	55	53
Quarrelling	30	45	38
Time-keeping	30	25	28

* Percentage of groups in which children's comments included this theme.

Analysis of participants' replies to this activity suggested three broad themes, about 'work', about 'school' and about 'behaviour'. Tables 9.1 and 9.2 provide frequency data under each of these themes, as well as for more specific categories within these themes. In general, participants' replies to the question about what 'pleases' mirrors their reply to the question about what 'displeases'. Parental expectations about good work, obedience and good behaviour are powerful in the *minds of working children, and consistently so,* amongst the vast majority of the groups in this study. By contrast, school themes are mentioned by less than half the groups in their discussion of parents' expectations. This contrast will be discussed in Chapter 10.

'Work' in parents' expectations

Work themes recurred as frequently for boys' as for girls' groups, but there were important differences in the focus of parents' expectations. The following examples from a brickchipper in Bangladesh, and a farm worker in The Philippines illustrate the theme of 'earning money':

"They want us to work and bring home a fist full of money, so that we can all eat.

"Our parents are very happy if we bring home some food for them to cook. Like the fish we catch and the vegetables we cook."

Very frequently replies referred to 'domestic chores' as well as helping parents with their work, especially farming and fishing. In children's replies, unpaid family work was often indistinguishable from domestic work, illustrated by these comments from Guatemala and Ethiopia:

"Our parents are happy when we help them with the work."

"When we live with them they expect us to do domestic work, collecting firewood, looking after cattle, making baskets."

A final group of replies refers to young people involved in 'family care': looking after members of their family, parents, brothers and sisters etc.; as well as looking after family welfare in general, as here from The Philippines and Bangladesh:

"If we can give money to our little brothers/sisters and take care of them."
"If I am affectionate to my younger sister and brother, she (mother) is very pleased."

Overall Table 9.1 shows a higher proportion of boys' groups referred to 'earning money' pleasing their parents, while a higher proportion of girls' groups referred to 'domestic chores' and 'family care' as pleasing their parents. However the extent of this division of labour varied between countries. Boys' groups in The Philippines and Ethiopia frequently referred to 'domestic chores', whereas boys' groups in the countries of Central America were much less likely to view their parents' expectations in these terms. In Bangladesh, no group of boys mentioned this kind of work as important, reflecting cultural traditions about the division of labour between men and women.

Questioned about the things that 'displease parents' confirmed the importance of work in children's minds. These examples are from The Philippines and Bangladesh:

"(They are unhappy) if we do not help on the farm. They say we are lazy. Lazy people do not get rich... If we complain about work, our parents say we are just making excuses. They say 'What is hard in helping?'"

"Once, when I didn't fetch water when my mother was asking me to, she became so furious that she picked up bricks from the roof-top and hit me on my back so many times that I became unconscious for half-an-hour."

The gender divisions in children's view of their parents' expectations were reflected in what makes their parents cross with them. Boys groups more often referred to 'Slacking from work' and failing to bring home money, as for these boys, a news vendor in Ethiopia and a weaver in Bangladesh:

"(My parents are cross with me) if I don't finish selling the daily newspaper." "If we don't bring home money parents beat us."

The other category of reply was about 'failing to do tasks', for example as here from young girls in Nicaragua and the Philippines:

"(My parents are cross with us) when they send us to run errands and we delay."

"Once I had promised to pick shells in the sea shore. Instead I played with my friends and went home dripping. My parents got angry with me because we had no food to cook."

'Behaviour' in parents' expectations

Not surprisingly, general comments about obedience and good behaviour were heard very frequently in reply to questions about parental expectations, as from these young people in Nicaragua, The Philippines and Bangladesh:

"They get cross with me when I gamble my earnings at billiards... or when I fight in the street with other boys."

"If I don't listen to them. Or when I stomp my feet. Or when I do not immediately do what they say. Or when I answer them back."

"Many a time they beat us when we don't listen to them. They beat us with whatever is at hand - a sandal, a stick, a piece of fuelwood."

These comments do not relate directly to work expectations, but they reinforce the point that children who might appear to be working relatively autonomously on the streets are accountable to other family members, notably their parent or parents. They also reinforce the evidence of gender differences, with more girls' than boys' groups talking about obedience and good behaviour as ways of 'pleasing' parents. This is illustrated by girls' comments from Bangladesh, Guatemala and the Philippines:

"Parents expect honour and respectability from us and feel happy that we try

to maintain it."

"Not saying dirty words - our parents, teachers and adults don't like vulgar girls."

"Father and mother are pleased when we display helpfulness, honesty, industry, and performing household work."

What matters to children themselves?

To complement the activity about what young people think matters to their parents, they were asked their feelings about themselves (see box on Activity 3). Extensive research in developmental psychology has examined the way children's self-concept is constructed and changes through childhood and adolescence (Schaffer, 1996) and more particularly in development of self-esteem, or what Harter (1988) calls global self-worth. In the context of this study we were interested in the way work issues impinged on the way young people evaluate themselves.

Table 9.3 Reasons for 'feeling good' about self

	Girls' groups (Total=22) % groups*	Boys' groups (Total=25) % groups*	All groups (Total=47) % groups*
WORK THEMES	**45**	76	**62**
SCHOOL THEMES	**50**	**64**	**57**
RELATIONSHIP THEMES	73	**60**	**66**
Pleasing parents	50	32	40
Being well-behaved	90	3z	40
Being appreciated	23	23	23
SELF-IMAGE THEMES	**50**	**48**	**49**
Having nice things	23	24	23
Having friends	23	20	21
Being healthy and safe	9	12	**11**

*Percentage of groups in which children's comments included this theme.

Table 9.4 Reasons for 'feeling bad' about self

	Girls' groups	Boys' groups	All groups
	(Total=22)	(Total=25)	(Total=47)
	% groups*	% groups'	% groups`
WORK THEMES	**29**	**48**	**39**
Unable to work	5	16	11
Being poor	29	32	30
SCHOOL THEMES	**29**	**32**	**30**
RELATIONSHIP THEMES	**71**	**76**	**74**
Behaving badly	43	44	43
Being verbally abused	24	44	35
Being distrusted	19	12	15
Being punished	24	20	22
SELF-IMAGE THEMES	**43**	**32**	**37**
Shame of self	43	28	35
Gender identity	14	4	9

*Percentage of groups in which children's comments included this theme.

In many respects, young people's comments echoed their views about parental expectations, except that school themes figure almost as frequently as work themes in children's self-evaluation (see Chapter 10). In this chapter we concentrate on work, relationship and self-image themes.

'Work' in self-evaluation

For most groups, earning money and contributing to the family was talked about as an important aspect of 'feeling good' about self. But, there were gender differences, just like for parental expectations. Work was more consistently a concern to boys' than girls' groups (mentioned by 19 out of 25 boys' groups, but only 10 out of 22 girls' groups). Three boys' comments from Bangladesh, The Philippines, and Guatemala illustrate the point:

"When we are able to do a kind of work which brings home money it feels great."

"I can contribute to family needs even when young."

"We are helping our parents' work even though we are young. We are not just another mouth to feed. We are helping the family survive."

Interestingly, in one of the girls groups where earning money was mentioned, it was linked to school expenses and self-image:

"(I feel good when I'm) helping with expenses for my studies and my clothes."

When children were asked what makes them 'feel bad', work issues were much less frequently mentioned directly, although the gender difference was maintained (12 out of 25 boys' groups compared with 6 out of 21 girls' groups:

"I feel bad if I can't work."

"I once bought many copies and the newspaper was not sold. I lost 40 birr, but my mother comforted me and lent me some money so that I could restart. Now I have repaid the loan."

Young people were much more likely to frame their bad feelings in terms of being poor, than in terms specifically of work:

"We would like to have many things but our parents can't give us everything because there is no money."

'Relationships' in self-evaluation

Like for parental expectations, many of the general comments that children made about what makes them 'feel good' or 'feel bad' were strongly linked to their working lives. A common self-evaluation theme was about relationships, pleasing parents, being appreciated etc., which very often echoed concerns that parents expect obedience, good behaviour and hard work. These children in Bangladesh, The Philippines, El Salvador and Guatemala illustrate the point:

"I feel very happy when I help or do good work and then if I am appreciated." "My good attitude... my good looks... my work as a domestic." "That I obey my parents, and that they think I'm a good girl."

"That our parents love us is the best, they feel good when they see we are respectful and hard working."

Just as children talk about feeling good when their work is appreciated, they feel bad when they are rejected, humiliated and chastised. They talked about feeling ashamed by their situation or by the way they are treated by parents, employers, customers or peers; as explained by a domestic worker in Bangladesh, a market worker in Nicaragua and a fireworks maker in Guatemala:

"I feel terrible when visitors in *bibi saheb's* (employer's) house is always scolding me... Because we are poor, *bibi saheb is* always saying: 'stand away from me. Don't touch my clothes'. As if our body is smeared with filth."

"When they (people in the market) tell me I am like a pig and I am nosing into other people's business."

"Other children are well dressed and I'm not, they only stare at me, that makes me ashamed."

Young people's sensitivity to being humiliated is also expressed in comments about injustice - about being unfairly accused, disbelieved, distrusted or punished.

Girl farm workers spoke of the times when they are wrongly accused:

> "We don't like to be accused of things we haven't done." This was a common complaint made by domestic workers in Bangladesh:

> "I feel so ashamed when the employer or her family members accuse me, saying...`I don't see food here. You must have eaten it' ...without knowing who did it."

In some cases these bad feelings were specifically linked to the punishments experienced at the hands of adults. Once again, domestic workers in Bangladesh had distressing experiences to relate, such as about beatings received from their employer:

> "When I get beaten or shouted at in front of guests I feel very ashamed. If they (the employer) beat me when there is no one around, OK; but why in front of the guests?"

'Self-image' in self-evaluation

All of these concerns about humiliation, being falsely accused, being unfairly punished etc. are closely linked to young people's self-image - whether they feel proud of themselves or ashamed of themselves.

When group participants were asked to think about things that make them feel good about themselves, their comments were frequently about having earned enough money to eat and dress well, feel and look good:

> "When I can buy a necklace, a nose-ring and other trinkets with my own hard-earned money then I feel very proud of myself."

Others talked about the importance of being healthy, having family and friends around them:

> "I have many friends to play with, especially when pasturing the carabao in the field. We go swimming, climbing trees, and play hide and seek."

Conversely, asked what makes them feel bad about themselves, a third of groups made statements about feeling ashamed, for being poor, for having to work and for bearing the signs of physical labour:

> "I feel ashamed because I have scars and sores I got from working." "I am ashamed of being a prostitute."

Some of young people's concerns about their self-image were clearly linked to their gender identity, and their relationships with the opposite sex. In Guatemala, a boy who makes fireworks felt that he is unattractive to girls:

> "I feel bad (when I see pretty girls) because sometimes I'm very dirty and can't tell them anything, I am very embarrassed."

In Bangladesh, girls face the issue of their relationships with young men being regulated by their family:

"(I feel bad) when anyone says, `look at her, she is a grown-up girl. If you get her married today she will have a child tomorrow."

For some children, this activity was an opportunity to reflect on their circumstances, express their frustration about their situation, and imagine ways in which their lives might have been different. A girl in The Philippines felt guilty about wanting to play when she was expected to work; a boy in rural Guatemala worried that his work restricts his possibilities for living and learning:

"Sometimes I feel lazy. I feel bad because we cannot just be. Sometimes, I want to do nothing but play, but I cannot do this."

"We feel bad about having to work always... we almost never leave the village, we don't know much, we are only here."

In Guatemala another girl talked about the family problems that make her life difficult:

"When our father drinks liquor we are afraid something bad will happen to him... Our parents argue, say bad things to each other. When this happens we prefer to leave the house. It is a very bad example, our small siblings get scared and cry and so do we."

Finally, a domestic worker in Bangladesh day-dreamed about how different her life might have been:

"I wish we lived in a nice environment where my father would have worked and my mother would have stayed home and cared for us. And I would not have worked. I would have had fun with my brothers and sisters."

Conclusion

The working lives of young people in this study were closely linked to their family relationships, with very few exceptions. This chapter has explored two aspects of this issue: children's perspectives on their parents' expectations; and children's evaluation of their own self-worth.

Asking children what they think pleases and displeases their parents demonstrates the interdependence of work and family lives for most of the children in the occupational situations in this study. Participants most often refer to work-related themes as pleasing parents: earning money, helping with parents' work, doing domestic chores, looking after siblings and generally showing loyalty towards the family. The other major theme of good manners, obedience etc. covers many different aspects of social behaviour. But even this theme is frequently linked to children's working lives, especially in terms of the emphasis on obedience and the reference to (often harsh) punishments that follow a misdemeanour.

The gender differences in children's perception of these issues is clear even from relatively crude comparisons of frequency of mention by groups. Girls' groups more often refer to the value placed on their domestic and other unpaid work, while boys' groups more often talk about being appreciated for earning money.

Gender differences also show up in behavioural expectations, with girls' groups more consistently talking about the importance of obedience and good behaviour.

In many respects, young peoples' self-evaluation echoes their beliefs about what their parents expect. For over half the groups, working and earning money plays a prominent role in whether children feel good about themselves, but this is more frequently mentioned by groups of boys than groups of girls, presumably because girls' work is less visible and less often yields direct personal earnings. Work issues were rarely mentioned in reply to questions about negative feelings. Participants more often framed their negative evaluations in terms of the poverty of their circumstances, as it affects their lives and opportunities.

The most frequently mentioned themes in children's view of themselves are not directly about their work or their school. They are about the quality of their relationships within these and other contexts, about how their behaviour is judged by others, how fairly they feel they are treated, about the judgements that people make of them, and about their own sense of self-worth. A large number of reasons for positive self-evaluation cluster around pleasing parents, feeling appreciated, and being valued for good behaviour. Conversely, a large number of reasons for negative self-evaluation cluster around being chastised, humiliated, distrusted and unfairly punished. These young people were particularly sensitive to being shamed and ridiculed. Many spoke about feeling good when they have nice things, are able to enjoy themselves, feeling safe with family or friends. But other comments spoke of a profound sense of personal shame because of the poverty of their circumstances, the necessity of their work and the degrading way they are treated.

Chapter 10: The importance of work and school in children's lives

In this chapter we return to questions about the relative importance of school versus work in children's own developmental priorities. Recall from chapter 7 that 77% of the young people in this study favoured combining work with school, with some important variations between regions and occupations in preferences for 'school only' or 'work only'. This statistic leaves many questions unanswered. For example:

- How far are children's priorities for school and work shaped by what they think their parents expect of them?
- Do school and work have the same priority in children's personal feelings about what gives them self-worth and self-esteem?

These questions can be explored by looking more closely at children's answers to Activity 3, which asked children what pleases/displeases parents, and what makes them feel good/bad about themselves. This chapter provides further evidence about the way children's perspectives are shaped by their cultural, family and work contexts. In particular we draw attention to variations in the extent of family influence on working children, as well as children's own sense of potential for at least some degree of personal influence over their present priorities and their future prospects.

From Table 9.1 and 9.2 it is clear overall that 'work' and 'behaviour' themes dominated children's replies to questions about what pleases and what displeases parents. School themes were much less commonly mentioned. 41% of groups spoke about their parents' pleasure when they were studying hard and doing well at school - 35% spoke about their displeasure when school was going badly:

> "(Our parents are happy) when we do our homework and get good results and are praised by our teachers."
> "We like our teacher and our parents to feel proud that we are good students."
> "Our parents get sad, sometimes they get very angry and tell us that maybe we weren't born to study."

But there is a very clear contrast between parental expectations and children's self-evaluation. School themes are more frequently heard in children's replies to questions about what makes them 'feel good' and 'feel bad' about themselves (Table 9.3). Groups make almost as many comments about 'school' as about 'work' in both cases, and there is a clear pattern related to gender, with more boys' groups than girls' groups referring to both of these themes. These comments are from boys in Ethiopia, Nicaragua and the Philippines:

> "I was happy when I stood 3rd in my class and my parents bought me new clothes as a prize."
> "(I feel good) when I pass to the next grade and I make the most of the year."

"(I feel bad) when my notebooks are not complete and sometimes I do not have projects to submit."

Already this overall picture draws attention to an important lesson of this study. For many groups of working children, a discrepancy exists between what children think are their parents' priorities, and what they value for themselves. Work appears more significant to parental expectations than to personal evaluation, at least from the children's point of view.

However, this overall picture conceals some important variations between the groups, related to the context of their working lives. To provide a more detailed picture, children's replies to Activity 3 have been reanalysed in Figure 10.1 and in Tables 10.1–10.4 using categories that echo the judgements they were asked to make in Activity 4 (see Chapter 7). Groups have been divided into four categories: those that mentioned work themes only; those that mentioned both work themes and school themes; those that mentioned school themes only; and those that mentioned neither work nor school themes. In Figure 10.1, replies to the questions about 'what pleases parents?' are compared with replies to 'what makes you feel good about yourself?'

Figure 10.1 The place of work and school in perceived parental expectations versus self-evaluation

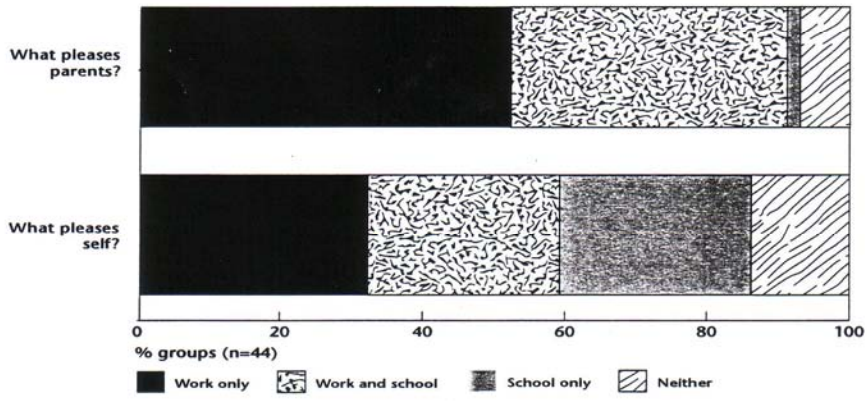


Table 10.1 The relative significance of 'work' and 'school' themes in parental expectations and self-evaluation - groups in Bangladesh.

	"What pleases parents?" Number of groups* (Total= 10 groups)	"What feels good about self?" Number of groups* (Total= 10 groups)
Only work themes	9	8
Work and school themes	1	0
Only school themes	0	1
Neither theme	0	**1**

* Number of groups in which children's comments included this theme.

Table 10.2 The relative significance of 'work' and 'school' themes in parental expectations and self-evaluation - groups in Ethiopia.

	"What pleases parents?" Number of groups* (Total= 6 groups)	"What feels good about self?" Number of groups* (Total= 6 groups)
Only work themes	2	3
Work and school themes	3	2
Only school themes	0	0
Neither theme	1	1

* Number of groups in which children's comments included this theme.

Table 10.3 The relative significance of 'work' and 'school' themes in parental expectations and self-evaluation - groups in the Philippines.

	"What pleases parents?" Number of groups* (Total= 13 groups)	"What feels good about self?" Number of groups* (Total= 13 groups)
Only work themes	6	3
Work and school themes	7	7
Only school themes	0	3
Neither theme	0	0

* Number of groups in which children's comments included this theme.

Table 10.4 The relative significance of 'work' and 'school' themes in parental expectations and self-evaluation - groups in Central America.

	"What pleases parents?" Number of groups* (Total= 15 groups)	"What feels good about self?" Number of groups* (Total= 15 groups)
Only work themes	6	0
Work and school themes	6	3
Only school themes	1	8
Neither theme	2	4

* **Number of groups in which children's comments included this theme.**

Figure 10.1 confirms that more groups of children place emphasis on school themes in their self-evaluation than in their view of their parents' expectations. But Tables 10.1-10.4 show that the contrasts between the local studies are striking. Looking first at 'What makes you feel good about yourself?' 8 out of 10 groups in the Bangladesh study only mention work themes, no doubt reflecting the limited opportunities for schooling in their lives. Schooling is much more significant for children in the three other studies, and this is reflected in their replies. So, in Ethiopia 5 out of 6 groups mentioned either work only or work and school themes. In The Philippines, 3 groups only mentioned work themes. Most referred both to school and to work, and 3 only felt school themes were important in their appraisal of what makes them feel good about themselves. Groups in Central America represent the other extreme from Bangladesh, in that only 3 out of 15 groups mentioned work at all, while 8 recognised school issues as important to how they felt about themselves.

These patterns illustrate the varying status of work in young peoples' personal priorities. Although by definition, all the children in the study are currently working, in many cases long hours and under arduous conditions, and they all recognise parental expectations that they work, the psychological importance of their work appears to be different, and its perceived place in their sense of personal identity and future prospects. While work appears to be at the core of children's identity amongst most of the groups in Bangladesh and some of the groups in Ethiopia and The Philippines, it is less significant to many of the groups in Central America.

These patterns draw attention to a 'generation gap' in some contexts, between *what children value* for themselves, and the pressure of parental expectations. Comparing "What pleases parents?" with 'What feels good about self?", Tables 10.1-10.4 suggest broad consistency in the priority given to work by parents and children in Bangladesh, at least from children's point of view. Contrast this with Central America where children consistently value school much more centrally for themselves, while they believe their parents are more interested in their contributions to work, or to work alongside school. The greater prominence of

'school' in the self-evaluation of groups in The Philippines and especially in Central America, may reflect these children's greater autonomy in making judgements about the value of work versus school.

This conclusion was confirmed when participants were questioned about where their work fits within the long term future. Children in Bangladesh tended to see their current work as a long term vocation, or more pessimistically as an inevitable future. This was especially clear for the girls' groups, for example, these brickchippers were resigned to following the wishes of their parents now, and their husbands in the future:

"Whatever my mother says we have to follow."

"Husband will say 'go break bricks. Work and feed yourself'."

For the boy weavers in Dhaka, and the farm labourers in the countryside, the future and the present were one and the same, and strongly constrained by family tradition and limited opportunities:

"As long as we live we have to do this work." "We will work as long as we were are asked to."

Other groups envisaged their current working activities as necessary and appropriate for their age and stage, and as a stepping-off point into better work. A group of boys working as porters in The Philippines' fishing industry said:

"It was a natural choice to work in places we see everyday, like the pier and the ports, the seashores. Maybe when we grow older, we will have other choices, but still we want to work in the ports."

Their aspirations included setting up their own business, but they still saw their destiny in terms of traditional fishing occupations in their community.

The majority of young people in The Philippines study expressed hopes for a different future. They recognised the necessity of their current work in order to help their families, but did not see it as a long term vocation. Unlike the young people in Bangladesh, they felt they had some choices, and in most cases they felt they could decide their own future, at least in theory, although one farm worker seemed to recognise the constraints in practice:

"We are free to dream ... anyway."

Participants in some of the girls' groups joked that their problems would be over "when I marry a very rich man". But they also talked more seriously about ambitions to complete their studies and find better jobs, perhaps by moving to Manila, or finding work overseas as a maid.
For some, future aspirations were very modest:

"I want to be able to buy roofing sheet to fix our leaking roof."

This belief that child work was a short term necessity was most strongly expressed by several of the groups in Central America. Consistent ,with their replies to Activity 3, these young people saw working as part of their obligation to their families

during the years of childhood. For some of the boys in Guatemala, making fireworks was a good way of earning money while they were still at school. But once they finished school they would want to look for better things.

> "I've been working (in fireworks) for 5 years and I want to stop. When I leave here I'm going to the capital city to work."

The streetworkers in Nicaragua recognised that they needed to improve their situation. As one reflected:

> "It cannot be the way it is now, it must be better. You know, when you are small, you think one way... but when you grow up (you realize) you don't even know what is going on."

Similar views were expressed by farm workers in El Salvador. These young people had high aspirations, to become secretaries, teachers, even lawyers or doctors. But they could also see a more realistic view of their future:

> "(We will be working on the farm) until we are very very old and can no longer work nor grab the sickle... we will work until we die... until we are stiff."

Conclusion

These findings raise fascinating questions about the significance of work in children's lives, in the context of their relationships, past traditions and vision of their future. They draw attention to the importance of the psycho-social dimensions of childwork issues. Instead of trying to identify the harmful effects of work in any absolute sense, it is essential also to ask about the value children place on their work, their personal investment in their occupation as a long term future as well as childhood necessity.

How children view their work, its place in their self-esteem and personal identity will fundamentally alter the impact of any intervention, to regulate their work or prevent them from working altogether.

Only a more extensive and more detailed in-depth study would address these questions. It must be emphasised that this is an exploratory study, with only a small number of cases in each occupation, in each situation. Despite these limitations, the accounts in this study do confirm the following:

- Young people feel an obligation to live up to family expectations that they will make an economic contribution, in cash, produce or general family support. Work also has a central place in the way most of these groups of young people judge themselves;
- Young peoples' inclusion of school as part of their view of parental expectations and as part of their self-evaluation, is highly variable according to the status of school in children's lives. Where school attendance is the norm, there is some evidence that children value school more than they believe their parents value it;
- The social environment of family, work and school is very salient to young peoples' comments on parental expectations, as well as their self-evaluation.

They recognise the expectations placed upon them for good behaviour, obedience and respect and they value being appreciated for the work they do. At the same time they are highly sensitive about perceived humiliation, unfair or abusive treatment by parents, employers, customers and peers. These feelings are most strongly expressed in situations (such as domestic work by girls) where young people feel their lives are controlled by an employer. These experiences contribute to a sense of shame and worthlessness, as well as feelings about being stigmatised by their poverty and the necessity of their work.

Chapter 11: Implications: Helping children's lives to work

Child labour has become a major focus of international action in the closing years of the twentieth century, with ever more vigorous steps being taken to try to eliminate the most hazardous and exploitative situations throughout the world. This study was born out of three main concerns: about the ways the problem of child labour has often been conceptualised; about some of the strategies proposed as solutions; and about the underepresentation of the principal stakeholders - working children themselves. The study was initiated to try to ensure that working children are able to take part in the process of defining 'the problem' and introducing 'solutions' and thereby determining their own destiny. In short, the aim was to make sure that their voices are heard in the child labour debate. Qualitative research methods were used as a vehicle for extending the numbers and range of working children able to participate (at least indirectly) in shaping policies and programmes to combat child labour. In this final chapter, I summarise this study of children's perspectives and consider the implications, both for policy and practice in the field and for future research.

Article 32 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is currently the most powerful regulatory instrument against child labour. It is framed as about protecting children from the potential harm that work can cause to their physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Studying children's perspectives poses a welcome challenge to the way we think about 'development' and 'harm', and the way we translate 'protecting' children into practice. For most of the twentieth century, theories about children's development have been dominated by a natural science paradigm, in which children were observed and experimented on, as objects of study and compassion. Children were thought of as immature innocents, only slowly acquiring the competence that entitled them to the citizenship status enjoyed by the adult community, who care about, control and theorize about their children's dependency and egocentricity (Greene, 1997). The presumption that this is a natural and universal process has resulted in highly specific, cultural expectations of childhood being projected as a standard for all children (Boyden, 1990; Burman, 1996). For example, the authors of State of the World's Children fall into the trap thus:

> "In industrialised countries, it is now almost universally accepted that if children are to develop **normally** and **healthily**, then they must not perform disabling work."
>
> (Unicef, 1997, p 29, my emphasis)

Dominant images of childhood don't just see work as inconsistent with psychological adjustment. They also emphasise the value of specialised childhood environments at home and school, offering high levels of material resource, including specialised toys and equipment, as well as adult attention devoted exclusively to children's welfare and learning. Childhood is conceptualised as a period of economic dependency, often extending well beyond puberty. It is a period of life

devoted to play and education in age-grouped, individualised, usually highly competitive school systems.

Contemporary working children are inevitably excluded from this definition of 'normal' and 'healthy' childhood. All too easily the specific issue of combating grossly exploitative child labour becomes blurred into more general proposals to eliminate work from children's lives altogether, in order (so the argument goes) that children can regain this coveted experience of childhood. What's missing from the analysis is recognition that the 'childhood' of which working children are said to have been deprived is a relatively recent cultural invention.

Writing a history of British child labour policies, Cunningham writes:

> "Until the late eighteenth century, governments and voluntary organizations devoted their efforts not to stopping child labour but to forms of job creation which would ensure that children had work."
>
> (Cunningham, 1996, p 41)

Listening to contemporary working children's perspectives highlights the contradictions between competing cultural expectations of childhood, as children try to make sense of their social world, in contexts often marked by rapid social change and social transformation. For example they may experience the pressure of traditional child development goals that emphasise early initiation into economic activity, alongside pressures to achieve in school, with the uncertain promise of economic and social mobility (see also Oloko, 1994). Increasingly, their attempts to make sense of these pressures are also informed by global consumer lifestyles and idealised media images of childhood and adolescence (White, 1996).

The concept of 'harm' in Article 32 is just as problematic as the concept of 'development'. While systematic research is essential into associations between children's work, their health and other psycho-social indicators, efforts to combat child labour cannot rely solely on 'objective' indicators of hazard. It must also take account of the perspectives of the principal stakeholders in the child labour debate - the children themselves. How far a hazard actually harms children's development depends on children's vulnerability, the significance of work in the wider context of their lives, as well as the value attached to their work by those on whom they depend for support and self-esteem. Besides having a right to be heard about matters that affect them, working children are an essential source of evidence about how their work may be affecting their development. Seeking children's perspectives on their working lives is a first step towards their participation in shaping their own future lives, and the future of children's work in general. Failure by the adult world to take account of children's perspectives serves to perpetuate the unequal power relationships that underpin the processes of child exploitation itself.

In short, for this study, we did not ask directly about the effects of work on development. Instead we asked about the place of work in children's lives, from children's point of view. Instead of focusing solely on whether work is harmful, we asked children about both positive and negative aspects of their work. Instead of treating work in isolation, we asked about the wider context of children's work, in

terms of their economic circumstances and family obligations, their early initiation into work and their future prospects. Instead of assuming that school is preferable to work, we asked how children reconcile competing pressures to work, to go to school, to do domestic chores and to play. As well as looking at situations where children are coerced and cajoled into working, we also asked children how far they feel able to take some initiative and responsibility for what they do. Most important, to counteract the image of working children simply as passive victims, we asked about their active attempts to make sense of their circumstances and improve their prospects. We asked them for their own views about many of the issues facing working children. We asked them about whether children should work at all, from what age, and in what kinds of jobs. We also asked them which kinds of work are best for children, and why.

The emerging picture is of children actively trying to make sense of their working lives, able to express their feelings, experiences and ideas within the informal and supportive context of their peer group. They complain about many aspects of their lives: their working conditions, the long hours, the way they are treated and exploited. They also recognise that their lives are strongly constrained by their circumstances, especially the poverty that makes their work so necessary, and the feasibility of attending school. Learning about these constraints is part of their childhood, as is recognising where they can negotiate limited choices, in order to enhance their situation. To outsiders, working children may appear victims of circumstance, in need of protection from the hazards of their working lives. Working children do not necessarily see things that way. Despite the hardships they face, many of which they recognise, they often identify strongly with their work, with the income it brings to themselves and to their families, and the relative autonomy that comes with earning a little money for themselves. The working lives of children in this study were in most cases strongly shaped by parental expectations. They were also conditioned by children's awareness of their gender and of the age-appropriateness of different kinds of work. Most important, working children do not all agree about the place of work in their lives, any more than a diverse group of adult workers would agree about equivalent issues in their working lives. Recognising issues that are shared, as well as recognising children's unique experiences, is essential to developing policies that are child-centred and in children's interests.

Implications for children and work

The major lessons of this study for policy and practice can be summarised under six main headings:

Listening to children who work

It is feasible and effective to involve working children themselves in the process of combating child labour. Listening to children draws attention to the reality of their lives, as they understand it. This must be the starting-point for intervention, in ways that take account of their circumstances, their prospects and their aspirations

for their lives, both in relation to their work, their schooling and their community. First steps have recently been taken in this direction but major strides must now be made to increase children's participation, building on the evidence of research and good practice (e.g. Hart, 1997; Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Johnson et al., 1998). Creative ways must be sought of ensuring that children's voice is heard at every stage of the process, from international policy-setting through to local project planning. Participation at local level must be direct and personal. At national and international level, participation can be enhanced by more indirect approaches, including qualitative studies of the kind described in this report, which have the potential to represent the views of large and diverse groups.

Bridging the gap between universal principles and childhood realities

Children's perspectives draw attention to the gulf that can exist between universal principles and childhood realities. Assuming universal agreement could be reached on the desirability of work-free childhood futures, implementing that vision would be a long term process. That long term vision must not be confused with the immediacy of addressing the work-full childhoods that are reality for many millions of the world's children. Their present reality must be the starting point for interventions. Children are not nourished by idealisations, nor do they learn from them. While many children in this study would share in the dream of good schooling, secure jobs and a prosperous lifestyle, their present reality is of low paid jobs, poor prospects and indifferent schooling. In due course, they may aspire to create better opportunities for their own children, and hope for economic progress that will one day make children's work unnecessary. But their current priority is to protect their own welfare, within the everyday contexts that they understand and to which they can contribute. The importance of distinguishing preventative work for future generations and supportive work for current generations is one of the major conclusions of the parallel study on projects for working children (Tolfree, 1998).

Initiating context-appropriate strategies

Singling out particular children's occupations as the target of intervention is a dangerous strategy. Driven by external interests, media attention or public pressure it can be insensitive to the context of children's lives, neglecting to consider the place of work in their personal biography, and the availability of alternative sources of income. Seeking the perspectives on garment work amongst groups of girls in Bangladesh (described in chapter 4) is an antidote to this approach. These girls faced very restricted life opportunities. They aspired to work in a garment factory, as one of the best jobs available, far better than the maltreatment suffered as domestic workers or the endless toil as brickchippers. But brickchipping doesn't link to international commercial interests and the hazards of domestic work have until recently been largely invisible. The consequence is that piecemeal and contextually-inappropriate interventions can destroy these young women's aspirations.
As White has argued:

"... any boycott or international sanctions must first, select the right target; and second, ensure that the objective is one which the target group (in this case, exploited working children) would agree."
(White, 1996, p 835).

Preventing children from working because their working lives don't accord with Western expectations of childhood can amount to a double-deprivation. They are excluded from a work-free childhood because of their poverty, limited educational opportunities, often compounded by social discrimination. Denied access to valued occupations can mean they also feel excluded from their own working childhood.

Planning comprehensive strategies

Studying children's perspectives draws attention to the inadequacy of policies to eradicate child labour, unless they are embedded in more comprehensive programmes of economic, educational and social development. As Unicef has argued:

"..any programme of elimination that does not offer reasonable alternatives for child workers - which from high moral ground simply casts them out of a workplace they had only entered due to extreme poverty - would trigger an avalanche of negative consequences."
(Unicef, 1997, p 47)

Focusing on the harmful impact of work in children's lives makes little sense unless their work is understood in the wider context of other influences, notably family poverty and school opportunity. It is worth noting that the second clause of Article 32 of the UN Convention requires States Parties "to take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article."

As Chapters 5 and 6 made clear, children also think about child work issues in a holistic way. They are aware of many of the hazards they face in their work, and their vulnerability to maltreatment and exploitation. But in many cases they also recognise benefits in work, and the economic necessity that they continue to contribute to their families, which in some cases is a matter of their own personal choice. The same applies to school. Young people in this study recognise the value of school and the potential for enhancing life chances. But school is not seen as an unqualified blessing any more than work is seen as an unremitting burden. Many children enjoy school, but they also complain about the poor quality of teaching, especially the harsh discipline and beatings. Realistically, school teaches many children some basic literacy and numeracy, but it also teaches others that they are failures, and have little prospect of attaining ambitions that depend on school achievement. As Himes et al argue in the Latin American context:

"A broader debate needs to be initiated regarding new forms of schooling, and this exchange must not be limited to the traditional specialists in the field of education. The business sector and the trade unions for example, need to be

> mobilized to be part of the vanguard of the civil society demanding a better education system, a movement capable of breaking the deadening inertia of that system - a system which is insufficient, inadequate and frequently irrelevant."
>
> (Himes et al, 1994, p 17)

Faced with an imperfect world, most of the young people in this study continue to value schooling, but (as Chapter 7 clearly demonstrates) they do not see this as an alternative to working, at least not under their present circumstances. In the absence of measures to reduce child poverty and enhance educational opportunity, any new regulations on working childhoods (for example by setting a minimum age for starting work) risk driving the problem underground, making it even more difficult to provide the protection and support that working children seek (see Chapter 8).

Recognising the varying function of work in children's lives

Child work does not harm children's development in a once-for-all way. The young people in this study share many concerns about their work and about school. But in other respects, working children's views are uniquely related to their gender, their occupation and their outlook on their future, as Chapters 3, 9 and 10 made clear. At one extreme, this study encompassed children for whom work was the major activity in their lives, shaped by family traditions and expectations, as it had been since they were small, and seemed set well into the future. At the other extreme were children who spend a major part of their daily lives at school and have strong aspirations to achieve good grades in order to improve their prospects. Like the first group, these children felt strong parental expectations that they work and contribute to their families. Their work may carry similar risks of injury. But when the second group were asked about what they value for themselves, it became clear that childhood work plays a very different function in their lives. They see it as a short term necessity and not a long term vocation; ultimately, childhood work was much less significant for their identity and for their self-esteem.

Treating working children with respect

The way work affects children is mediated by beliefs about childhood shared by the adult community, and by working children themselves. These beliefs determine whether work is valued or degraded. It influences children's own beliefs about their work, their aspirations for their future and ultimately whether they are made to feel proud or ashamed for what they do. It is not just the physical conditions of work, the long hours and the hazards that affect children. They are acutely sensitive to their status as child workers, the way they are treated, thought about and talked about. In this respect, the way working children are represented in the media and public debate is not separate from the effects of child work. It is part of the process, in terms of the social labels that shape the way children are treated, as 'deprived' and 'destitute', or worse as 'vagabonds' or 'vermin'; labels which children may then appropriate for themselves, as part of their identity.

Great care must be taken in targeting specific occupations for elimination of child labour, in the way that the International Labour Office advocate:

> "If society as a whole recognises that child labour is a problem, the stage has been set to stigmatize and then eradicate its most abusive manifestations."
> (ILO, 1996, p 103)

The danger comes if working children themselves feel stigmatised and vulnerable to eradication. A feature of this study is the evidence that many of the issues that concern these young people are not about work *per se.* They cut across their experience of work, school and indeed family life (see Chapters 5, 6 and 9). They are about the respect that they are shown, or the ridicule they feel; about being treated humanely, or being cheated, beaten or abused. It is these aspects of 'harm' that appear uppermost in the minds of young people in this study, and about which they most urgently seek support. Treating children and young people with respect and dignity, whatever their circumstances, is a first step to enhancing the lives of children who work.

Implications for future studies

This study was designed to contribute to the international policy debate about child labour - making sure that children's voices are heard. The study has demonstrated the potential for seeking children's perspectives and the value of their perspectives in planning context-appropriate interventions. But this is only a beginning. This study is part of growing trend favouring children's participation. It opens the door to a much wider agenda for listening to working children, and indeed all the world's children, about their perspectives on their lives. I will single out just four areas for future action:

Planning and monitoring projects for working children

Children's perspectives are an essential source of information at all stages of planning and evaluating an intervention, whether at local, regional or national level. As well as contributing to a baseline understanding of the issues, children's perspectives can be part of the process of monitoring and evaluating the impact of a new regulation, or a project or other initiative. More than this, as David Tolfree explains in the parallel study on projects for working children, seeking children's perspectives isn't just a better way of understanding the problem and monitoring solutions. Working children can themselves be part of the solution, through projects that are run by working children, not just for working children (Tolfree, 1998).

Professional training

Listening to working children can be a powerful process of professional training for anyone who seeks expertise on child work issues at policy or programme level. Several of the local experts who carried out fieldwork for this study had many

years project experience of the issue. Yet once they started to work with the children in this study, they became aware of the preconceptions that coloured their own approach to the topic, and discovered the necessity of 'setting them to one side' in order to listen to what the children said 'with an open mind'. Carrying out group work doesn't just enhance fieldworkers' sensitivity to working children's concerns. It also makes them more reflectively aware of their own prejudices about childhood issues, shaped by their social class, their personal experiences of school and work, as well as their professional training. Through becoming more open and reflexive about child work issues, a participatory approach can encourage a more flexible and creative approach to their resolution, in which children are recognised as social actors, not passive victims.

In-depth studies of children's perspectives in context

This study can be the starting point for trying to better understand the interplay between children's working lives, their family lives and their school lives. While children's perspectives have been the exclusive focus of this study, (an intentional antidote to their conventional neglect), a more comprehensive understanding of child work issues can be achieved by extending research to include other major stakeholders alongside children, notably parents, teachers and employers. For example, Chapters 9 and 10 explored working children's beliefs about their parents' expectations, compared with their own self-evaluation. A more complete picture would emerge by also including parents' own stated expectations for their children to do paid work, undertake chores, achieve in school etc.

Making children's participation work

There is a strong case for involving children as participants in issues that so closely affect their lives. This study has illustrated one approach to putting participation into practice. But difficult issues remain to be resolved about how to reconcile children's rights to participation with their relative immaturity and need for protection. This is especially important in cultural contexts that do not respect children's rights at all. Conventional theories of child development emphasise children's incompetence, and the slow growth of their ability to take responsibility, make reasoned decisions etc. More recent theories offer a more positive framework for understanding the processes through which children can be guided to participate in skills and decision-making in different domains of their lives (Rogoff, 1990). Much misunderstanding still surrounds the concept of participation. For example it is sometimes confused with self-determination, as part of an argument that young children cannot possibly know what is in their best interests. So it is important to make clear that participation is not the same as self-determination. Even a three year old can be enabled to participate, within a framework that respects their abilities, frames their spheres of choice in age appropriate ways and respects their preferred ways of expressing feelings and beliefs (Millar, 1996). Much work remains to be done on the most effective way of facilitating participation, at local project level, as well as at national or international policy level.

From the children's point of view: **Appendix I**

Twenty child work situations compared

LOCAL STUDY 1. BANGLADESH

1.Brickchippers (girls)
2. Porters (boys)
3. Domestic helpers (girls)
4. Weaving and embroidery workers (boys)
5. Farm workers (boys)

LOCAL STUDY II. THE PHILIPPINES

6. Fishing workers (girls and boys)
7. Sugar Plantation workers (girls and boys)
8. Farm workers (girls and boys)

LOCAL STUDY Ill. **ETHIOPIA**

9. Shoeshine (boys)
10. Street vendors - snacks and newspapers (girls and boys)
11. Sex workers (girls)

LOCAL STUDY IV. CENTRAL AMERICA

Guatemala

12. Fireworks makers - porters and vendors (girls and boys)
13. Lead miners (boys)
14. Farm workers - Cardamom (girls and boys)

Nicaragua

15. Market workers - porters and vendors (girls and boys)
16. Street workers - shoeshine and vending (girls and boys)
17. Farm workers (girls and boys)

El Salvador

18. Supermarket baggers (boys)
19. Flower sellers (girls)
20. Farm workers (girls and boys)

For the most part, this report has summarised children's perspectives thematically. This appendix offers a more detailed account of the occupational situation of young people in this study. It is based on selected examples from each of the local studies. In the pages that follow twenty contrasting occupational situations are summarised based mainly on Activities 1 and 2 of *The Children's Perspectives Protocol (see* Appendix II). These activities were designed to address five major issues facing working children in a wide range of occupations and situations, as perceived by the young people themselves.

• How and why did children get started in their work?
- What do children earn, and what happens to the money?
- How do children describe their work?
- What are the priorities for working children?
- How does children's gender shape working lives?

LOCAL STUDY I. BANGLADESH

1. Brickchippers (girls)

The brickchippers who participated in this study were all living with their parents or other close family in slum areas within the city of Dhaka. Most of their families were recent migrants to Dhaka from rural areas of Bangladesh. Some girls migrated as infants, others have grown up entirely in the city. Most of these girls had dropped out of school after only a few years, or in some cases a few months. Three of the girls had never attended school. The reasons were clear:

> "My mother tells me to go to school, break bricks and do household chores. When I did that, I had no time to do my school lessons. And when I was unable to do my lessons the teachers used to beat me. So I decided it is better to quit school."

The working day described by these girls is long and hard. They start by 7 or 8 am, working for 2 or 3 hours at a time, with breaks to prepare meals, collect water, wash clothes and eat meals, and they do not finally rest until around 11 at night. Leaving aside the time spent on domestic chores, they work as brickchippers for around ten hours per day.

Many have been doing the work since they were old enough to hold a hammer, often working alongside their mothers at a brick-chipping field close by their home:

> "Our mothers bought us small hammers and we used to break the bricks for fun. It was like playing. Then gradually when we learnt how to use the hammer our mothers asked us to start working".

There is no question of choosing whether or not to work:

> "Without work there is no food at home... My father is old and cannot work. My mother, sister and I have to run the household."

Nor could they see alternative possibilities of work. Getting a job as a garment worker was difficult and becoming a domestic helper presented its own problems:

> "I tried to work as a domestic helper twice. The first time I was thrown out. The second time the *bibi-saheb* beat me in such a way that I cut my head, so I left."

As brickchippers, they might expect to earn between Tk 10-Tk 50 a day, or up to about Tk 150 per week. Their earnings are calculated by how much they work,

either in terms of the number of whole hard bricks broken or the length of the pile of broken bricks. One of their complaints was that their employers try to cheat them about the number of bricks, so they get less money. In any case, many of these girls do not ever see their earnings which are collected by their mothers:

"We don't feel like asking from our parents. Once in a while if we ask for Tk 1 or 2 they give us."

Or the girls may be given small amounts by older brothers and sisters:

"... we save it in the mud-bank. By *Eid*, we can save Tk 20 to 50 and we can buy ear rings, ribbons, hair clips, nose ring and pao-zeb... we don't tell our parents about our savings... (or) they take it promising that they will buy those trinkets for us but later due to hardship in the family they can't afford to give us anything."

Asked about solutions to the hardship of their work, these girls main priorities were very immediate - to work in the shade, to be given softer bricks, to have their medical costs paid when they injure themselves. They were clear where the long term solution would lie:

"There are no solutions to these problems... they will be solved if we stop brickchipping."

Looking to the future, some hoped to return to their village. Some wanted to start school again:

"Before we were young and didn't understand the value of studying. At that time we didn't enjoy studying but now we would like to go to school."

Others hoped that a good marriage would mean the end of brickchipping. But for the most part they were resigned to following the wishes of their parents now, and their husbands in the future:

"Whatever my mother says we have to follow."

"Husband will say 'go break bricks. Work and feed yourself'."

2. Porters (boys)

These boys also came from families who had migrated to Dhaka from rural areas. Family difficulties and poverty had forced their families to come to the city and the children to look for work. For example, one ten year old was orphaned as an infant and cared for by an aunt. But he ran away because of abuse from an older brother and came to Dhaka where he now lives with two other brothers and a sister. While most of the boys in these groups are living with members of their family, one lives in the city on his own, and another says he lives in the marketplace. Several felt their survival was at stake:

"I don't have a father. If I don't work do you think my brother would continue to feed me."

None were in school and many said they had never been to school. One boy was the oldest in the family and described how his parents' wages only covered their

house rent and basic expenses. The whole family were dependant on his earnings to be able to buy food. Another boy had been forced to take even greater responsibility:

> "At first, I used to study in a primary school as well as go to the mosque to learn Arabic. At that time my father was a rickshaw puller. Then he left that job and just started roaming around and doing nothing but taking loans from people. He takes no responsibility for the family... He is a bad man."

All these young porters start looking for customers around 8 am and work on and off throughout the day. Many combine being a porter with other casual work as a car watcher, driving rickshaws, bringing ice for the fishmongers etc.

The guards and young men who spend their time drinking in the market are the main source of their problems. They extort money, and beat-up the boys if they don't cooperate:

> "The young men... take away our money when they see a customer has paid a good amount. We can't do anything. If we resist or complain, they beat us up."
>
> "The market guard does not let us go near any car, but he can't say anything when the owner of the car asks us to guard it. So later, he would beat us if we don't give him any money from our earning."

The boys didn't feel able to complain to officials. They would just get thrown out of the market. For one boy, escape was the best solution, perhaps with one of the foreigners, who he said recruited migrant labour for the Middle East.

While these boys felt they had no choice but to work, several did feel they had some autonomy in choosing to make money as a porter. Virtually all had done other jobs before, as a domestic help, in a shop, collecting scrap etc. Asked how much they had earned the day before the focus group, their replies ranged from Tk 25-75. Unlike the girls in the brickchipper groups, these boys had more control over their money, typically spending a proportion of it on meals, playing video games etc. They also share a 'lottery with other boys, each contributing Tk 10 a day for 9 days and then on the tenth day taking turns to take the 'winnings'. Even so, the boys who are living with their families pay-over a major proportion of the earnings to their mothers or other relatives. One boy reported having a particularly bad day:

> "If I go home without earning any money, my mother would tie me up and beat me. That's why I didn't go home last night."

Unlike the brickchipper girls these boys could see a wider range of possibilities for the future. While many felt final decisions about their future lay with their families, some felt they had the autonomy to make the decision on their own. Most had no wish to continue being a porter in the long term. Some wanted to go back to their village, others wanted to become a full-time rickshaw puller, or to work in a shop.

3. Domestic helpers (girls)

As for other groups in the Bangladesh study, most of these girls were from families

who have migrated to Dhaka. They had little experience of schooling, although two had recently started attending a government school for 2 hours a day. Dropping-out of school was closely tied to shortage of money, especially because of the costs of school itself. One girl described how she made the decision herself:

> "I told my parents 'how can we afford so much expenses, its better that I work instead. By working, I won't be hungry and I'll earn money'. My mother said 'under such hardship I can't afford to send you to school. Its better you work'."

Although two participants in these groups had worked in garment factories before, most had started learning this work from the domestic chores they were already used to doing.

> "The work we do is not difficult to learn because we already learn to do those jobs in our own homes." Even so employers sometimes expected new skills to be learned: "We used to get beaten in the process of learning the work."

None said they received any of their earnings directly. Three said they only received their 'keep' in return for work. For the rest, their mothers came to collect their earnings on a monthly basis, around Tk 100-200 per month. At best they hope to be given a little pocket money.

According to these girls, the main problem as a domestic was not the hard work but the unsympathetic treatment they experienced from their employers. Just as the porters felt they were abused by the bullies in the market, so the domestics felt they were the scapegoat for whatever went wrong:

> "Once my employer's son had slapped me so hard that I fell, hit my head against a brick and fainted. He hit me because he was playing with a ball and I tried to catch it."

"If we make a slight mistake in our work, they start scolding and hitting us."

> "Many times... (my employer) doesn't recognise that I am also a *choto manush* (a young person, not an adult) - that I can also make mistakes."

The girls in this group debated the possibilities for finding a more sympathetic household. One of them expressed her sense of the hopelessness of their situation by saying:

> "There is fire everywhere. There is fire on this side and on that side. There is no water anywhere."
> Another one suggested:
>
> "Things will be easier and peaceful when I (get married and) go to my husband's home."

Others in the group laughed at the idea that marriage would make their lives easier:

> "Even there you will have to work a lot and you might be beaten by your husband and scolded by in-laws. Perhaps you will be one of the lucky ones

whose husband will treat you like a queen!"

Given the choice, participants in these groups would like to study and do a good job to help their families. But they do not see a wide range of opportunities. Their best hope is to get a job in a garment factory. Much will depend on the marriage that is arranged for them. In any event, their future rests with their families. As one put it:

"Girls have been born to work."

4. Weaving and embroidery workers (boys)

These two occupational groups comprised a very specific group within this study. They are members of the 400,000 strong Bihari community that live in relatively self-contained, predominantly Urdu speaking, communities throughout Bangladesh. The study looked at the situation of Bihari boys in informal sector workshops run by employers within their community. One group embroidered satin, silk cotton and other fabrics with sequins, beads and gold thread. A second group worked in the production of 'Benarsi' saries, (handwoven in gold, silver and silk threads). Only three of these boys had ever attended school. For the most part they had begun to learn their trade from 5-6 years, before they would have started school. Learning a skill was considered more important than learning literacy and numeracy in school:

"Our parents wanted us to learn the skill first. Going to school meant spending money which was not possible for our families." "Parents said 'once you learn this skill you won't have difficulties earning money'."

These boys work six days per week for anything up to 10 or 12 hours per day. Although one or two were managing to fit in a little part-time study, most expressed regrets that they had missed out on schooling:

"Because of this work, despite having eyesight we are blind. There is no opportunity to study. We don't know our way (around the City) since we can't read the road signs."

The boys working on embroidery are paid Tk 60 a day and a further Tk 30 if they work through the night. The weavers are paid weekly, the rate varying according to their skill. Half the group are now fully trained weavers and can earn as much as Tk 1200 a week for weaving 2 saries. The less experienced boys earn Tk 200 a week. Both groups say they give all their money to their families, and receive pocket money in return. Like for the other groups in Bangladesh, the physical hardship is only one of the boys' complaints. They also get upset when their employer delays paying their wages, and they live in constant fear of humiliating punishment if they make mistakes. They describe being beaten, made to lick-up an older weaver's or their employer's spit, or made to stand as 'a rooster' with their hands between their legs holding their ears and with a brick placed on their back:

"If we can't do the work well we are made into a *murga* (rooster) for half an hour or an hour."

The boys doing embroidery believe more rest periods and an improvement in wages would make their lives more bearable. The sari weavers have tried to set up a kind of weavers union. One boy argued for legislation, though it is notable that he didn't want to exclude his own age group from the work:

"It will be good if there is a law that no one below the age of 10 can do this work."

All the boys in embroidery work expressed the wish to stop doing their work during the coming year:

"I am already bored of doing this work for so long" (4 years).

However all admitted that their parents or older brothers would be the ones to decide. The weaving boys were more accepting of their vocation:

"As long as we live we have to do this work."

5. Farm Workers (boys)

Agricultural work was the focus for two groups of boys growing-up in rural villages 300-350 km from Dhaka. These boys had very little schooling, with just a few attending part-time in the afternoons. All lived with their parents, sisters and brothers, but their circumstances were different. One group came from families with little land of their own. These boys were mainly involved in cultivating other peoples land for sugar cane, garlic, onions etc. The other group worked as general farm labourers on land leased by their families, taking goats and cows to graze, and working paddy fields, frequently working alongside their fathers. Besides farm work, they were from time to time involved in carpentry, rice milling, and brick making. They saw themselves as working for their families and learning skills that would sustain them through life:

"(Work) helps me to earn my pocket-money and also contribute to my family's household expenses."
"We can't expect parents to feed us all the time."
"We have to take training to know how to work and survive. We can't afford to lie down and sunbathe like rich people."

Income from farm work is variable according to the season and the task. During the busiest time one group of boys reported earning Tk 40-60 and receiving three meals a day. In another village, a second group reported being paid Tk 15 for a half-day, including a meal (an adult would get Tk 20 for the same work). Whether paid in cash or produce, thirteen out of the fifteen boys report that they give either all or most of their earning to their families, being given a few taka pocket money to spend on themselves:

"Unless we are given Tk 5-10 it doesn't feel like money."

The remaining two have greater personal control over their earnings. One spends all his money on himself, while the other saves money with his mother, to help pay for his school costs.

These farm labourers recognised the problems that go with hard physical labour, but they considered these as inevitable:

"Our back aches when sowing or harvesting paddy, because we are either bending or sitting and working all the time. More or less, all work has some problems."

Those boys who were cutting sugar cane for bigger landowners were less tolerant of the exploitative ways in which they felt they were sometimes treated:

"There are some *gerestho* (landowners) who are bad. Even when our working time is over they say `there is still time, why don't you mend the fence properly...' They usually delay in paying our weekly wages."

At the same time these young workers felt intimidated by their employers, and powerless to do anything about their situation. They expressed this through a Bangla saying:

"By scolding us 'they can make us drink seven pitchers of water'. So what can we do?"

Participants in these groups did not have a strong plan for their future. Accepting their situation, they anticipated getting married and having a family. All but one expected to continue farm work, and most felt that their parents would decide:

"We will work as long as we were are asked to."

LOCAL STUDY II. THE PHILIPPINES

6. Fishing workers (girls and boys)

Fishing is a major activity in the Philippines archipelago of 7,000 islands. The industry is mainly carried out as a local, small-scale, low technology, family-based activity in which children have a significant role to play. After agriculture, fishing related occupations are one of the major forms of child work. Six groups were studied, covering a wide range of fishing-related and other work activities, mainly carried out within their own communities, for their families or other local employers.

By contrast with Bangladesh, all except 3 of the 38 participants in the study were attending full-time school (i.e. morning and afternoon sessions, five days a week).
So a major issue was how to reconcile the competing demands on their time. On school days, domestic chores were expected everyday (especially for girls) plus some fishing work (around 2 hours). But the main work was during weekends and school vacations. Two groups of children were under ten years old. The remaining four groups were 10-14 years old.

The youngest girls described their work drying, salting and selling fish with their parents or other fishboat owners. The older girls described how they are also involved in gathering shellfish and fry-catching, as well as dressing chicken:

"We gather the shellfish buried under the sand with our bare hands. We clean

the shells, put them in sacks and carry them on our heads. We grind tiny shrimps and fish with our bare feet, mixing them with salt, packing them in cans or bottles and delivering them to market."

The boys are already helping with drying, salting and selling fish from a young age, and they also wash boats for their family and other members of the community. Once they reach the age of 10 these boys will start to get involved in a wide range of fishing related activities. The older groups of boys talked about shell gathering and selling, diving for green shells, unloading fishing boats, sorting and selling fish, as well as buying gasoline and ice for fishboat owners, and collecting shells for selling as decorations. Amongst these older boys were the few school drop-outs. They worked as porters, hauling fish to the market for auction. This was evening work and they often worked right through until midnight. Despite the extent of their work, they were not officially recognised by the market administrator: "They just come here, we do not employ them."

It was these boys who described one of the hazards of this work, moving on planks from boat to shore:

"One day the owner got impatient with me. It is hard to balance, and that time I fell into the water. Sometimes we can fall on the ground of the pier construction site. One of my friends fell onto the mud. He died."

These boys were also concerned about the disruption to their schooling, when they miss classes. Like the girls, they were also sensitive to the way others talked about them. They hated being called 'sea lice' by other children.

All these children were living with their families in close-knit communities. Growing-up surrounded by fish-related activities, carried out by brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, brings about a great deal of incentive (and little choice but) to enter this work from an early age. They are initiated into simple skills from infancy, starting with activities considered appropriate for their age group and gradually acquire greater skill and responsibility. As one of the boys in the group with boys under 10 years old said:

"We just decided to work seeing other children working."

At the same time he acknowledged:

"I feel expected by my parents to work."

For the group of girls who were less than 10 years old, peer influences seemed very important - they wanted to be 'in' with their friends. At the same time all the girls acknowledged that they had little choice - their parents expected them to contribute. One girl said she had tried to complain to her father, but it did not make any difference. The only realistic alternative for these girls was to work as a domestic help.

Many of the children worked closely with their families; they were not paid when they were helping-out. They were frequently paid 'in kind' (e.g. in fish, shrimps or rice) when working for others, which they either gave to their families or tried to sell-on to others in the market. Most also earned money in their own right; estimates of daily earnings ranged from P10 to P100 -a day (P26 = US$1.0). When

asked what happens to their earnings, the vast majority said that most or all is given to their mothers. This was especially true of the youngest children. Only 6 children out of a total of 38 spoke of maintaining control over their income.

Many of the boys identified with their job, especially those that had already dropped-out of school. They came from poor, large families and felt pleased to be contributing:

> "We feel happy when we help our families, so we decided to work. Our brothers were working so we felt we also had to work, though our parents do not directly tell us so. We need to survive and advance as a family."

Their aspirations included setting up on their own in fishing, but they saw their destiny depending entirely on their parents' decisions.

Beliefs about the future were very different for the majority of boys, who were still combining work with attending school. They saw the necessity of their current work in order to help their families. But they also saw school as a route to better jobs, mostly in their own community. Unlike the young people in Bangladesh, these boys felt they had some choices, and in most cases they felt they would decide their own future.

Participants in the girls' groups shared the hope that working in fishing would only be a childhood occupation. They joked that their problems would be over "when I marry a very rich man" but they also talked more seriously about ambitions to complete their studies and find better jobs, in the supermarket or the shopping mall, or as a teacher or a nurse. For some, their hopes were very modest, and reflect the poverty of their circumstances:

> "I want to finish schooling so that I can help my mother to build a house of her own."

7. Sugar Plantation Workers (girls and boys)

Negros Occidental is the fourth largest island and a centre of sugar production. Working lives centre on the hacienda, where children are involved with all stages of sugar production:

> "We plant cut sugar cane stalks... weed and cut surrounding bushes... put fertilizer around each growing sugar cane plant... use the machete to harvest the cane and make-up the bundles."

The boys got started on this work from a very early age. One claimed to have started weeding at the age of 6 (as soon as he could distinguish grass from sugar cane), and started harvesting at the age of 7. Their circumstances are very poor. Both the parents of several of the boys work in the plantations. One boy is following in the footsteps of several generations of plantation workers. All of the boys participating in the study were still in school, (like the children in fishing) and their main work was done during weekends and vacations.

In the girls' focus group, two of the participants were not attending school. They would very much like to attend, but said their families couldn't afford the cost.

Even for the girls who are in school, there is much pressure to contribute to the family income. Parents need to recruit all the young help they can get to meet the expected quota. Inevitably, any money the children earn is paid directly to their parents. The girls hope that if they have worked well their parents will buy them a new dress or T-shirt.

These young plantation workers think in terms of three main kinds of difficulty that affect their work. Firstly, the exhaustion that comes from days spent working on hard ground under the heat of the sun, and the potential danger of accidents with sharp tools. Secondly, the strictness of the farm administrator who is described as 'unkind', who 'curses' and 'beats' them and makes them repeat work that is not well done. Thirdly, the strictness of their parents who get angry if they don't work. As one put it:

> "Our parents scold us if we are slow, or if we are playing around when we work."

Few of these young people saw their future as plantation workers in the long term. Several spoke of wanting to make the best of their schooling so they can get better jobs in Manila.

8. Farm workers (girls and boys)

The region of Davao, in southern area of The Philippines was the context for two groups of farm workers. All these children were living with their families, most **of** whom were tenant farmers. Their work schedule was based around attending time school, for all except one child. During school days, they did little work on the land, except during busy harvest times, when they would absent themselves from school for 3-4 days. But on non-school days they worked all morning and part of the afternoon. The boys' tasks were very varied including ploughing, planting, weeding and harvesting the land, cattle herding and livestock raising, fruit-picking and fishing. The girls generally did lighter farm work, which they had to combine with domestic work around the home.

"We are pressured by our families to work. If father has no income, our parents always quarrel. So we say to ourselves, why shouldn't we contribute?"

They saw work problems mainly in terms of physical fatigue, the risks of injury, coughs, colds and rheumatism:

> "Sometimes we are bitten by dogs, insects, snakes. We are cut by broken glass, nails, pieces of wood or tools."

But these young people were also concerned about the detrimental effects on their studies due to frequent absences from school. Virtually all thought that type of work would only by necessary while they were still at school. Most as " to long term work away from farming, or at least in work other than farm la although one did add:

> "We are free to dream... anyway."

A final group of farm boys were living in a village in Ilocos Norte (Northern

Philippines). This is an intensive rice-growing area, where tenant farmers multicrop the rice with garlic and tobacco crops. Landowners demand crop sharing ratios of up to 60-40, so there is much pressure on farmers to produce a high yield, if they are to support their family. Besides working the land, boys are expected to tend the carabao, pigs and chicken, pick vegetables, gather firewood and accompany their parents selling produce etc. But they are also all attending full time school, so they have to get up early to get jobs done before school, and they are expected to help with the livestock after school. There is no pay for this family based work, but the boys expect their parents to give them money for school costs, clothes and a little pocket money. When asked how they got into this work, comments included:

> "When we go to work, we feel that our parents expect us to help. Besides we feel that to be accepted by other people, we have to contribute to what they do.

> "And where can you find children who are not working, except for the children of the rich. Isn't that right?"

LOCAL STUDY III.

ETHIOPIA

9. Shoeshine (boys)

The study focused on two groups of shoeshine boys, from markedly contrasting circumstances. One group were recent migrants from the Guraghe region of Ethiopia. All but one of these boys had been in Addis Ababa for less than a year. They live with relatives or with other boys in shared rooms. None attended school. The other group were city boys living with their families and attending half-day school (either mornings or afternoons). These two groups see themselves as quite separate, and they work in different locations in the town. This summary refers mainly to the second group.

These boys combined domestic chores in the afternoon with school in the morning and work during the rest of the day, and during the evening. Combining these different tasks presented the boys with some difficulties:

> "Parents interfere with our work by ordering us to do domestic duties during our working hours. They sometimes call while we are working and send us on errands... Sometimes we get cheated, people steal our money, shopkeepers sell us bad polish, clients pay us low."

These boys don't just work weekdays, they also work through the weekend. In fact Sunday is their best day:

> "Sunday is special because people are travelling out of the city and they pay me more than the regular amount."

On a normal day these boys make about 4 birr, after they've paid for their food. They are proud of the 50% they give to their families:

"By working I have become equal to people who have money... Because of my earnings, my family are able to do what all other Ethiopian families do during holidays like Easter and New Year (i.e. they can afford to make a feast of meat)."

They are also proud that they contribute some of their money to an *Equb* formed amongst their fellow workers. *(Equb* is a co-operative into which each member contributes on a regular basis. Pay-outs are on a lottery system; as each member 'wins' his name is taken off the list, so that in the end everyone gets a turn to receive the large sum).

The shoeshine boys did not see their work itself as damaging. It is the context in which they work that affects them and the way they are treated by others. They hate being treated as 'vagabonds'. Everyone assumes they are thieves and cheats, not just children who need to earn their living. These boys felt the law should protect them better:

"Society must learn to respect all kinds of occupations. We also have a lot to learn, to be patient when people say bad things about our work. One way to make our work easier would be to agree the amount of money we can ask for each kind of job."

All this group of boys saw shoeshine as a convenient childhood occupation, necessary because of their poor circumstances. Ideally, half the group would like to quit because they feel their work has interfered with their education.

10. Street vendors - snacks (girls) and newspapers (boys)

These 23 children were all living with their families and in all but two cases they were attending school on a half time basis (mornings or afternoons). The girls sell kollo (a roasted cereal). A typical day begins with an early trip to the market to buy the ingredients to make the *kollo* for the day. They then assist their mother roasting the *kollo,* as well as doing domestic chores, before going out to sell around Merkato (the big market area in Addis Ababa), or in *a gulet* (open market) or in the bars. At lunch time they pass their basket of *kollo* onto a friend to sell while they go to school for the afternoon (12.30 - 5.30). By 6.30 they are out on the streets of the city again, offering their *kollo* to customers in bars and traditional drinking houses. It was their mothers or an older sister who introduced them to this work, and most were expected to give what they earn back to their mothers.
The girls were vocal about the difficulties they face:

"We face car accident and *kollo* spilling... and a customer who takes *kollo* without paying... and meeting mad people... and we face beating... and there are customers who pay low price... and when there is fighting around where we work we are badly affected."

Like the girls, the newspaper boys start early by going to the distributor to buy their newspapers. Some of them bought 30 copies a day, and others only 10. The boys express their dilemma about how to balance work with school. They like to be in the afternoon school shift, because papers sell better in the morning. But

they also believe that the morning school shift is better for learning.

One major issue for both these groups is that they have to make a capital investment each day. Making sure they sell all their goods is a major worry. A girl going home with *kollo* unsold is not popular and nor is a boy left with copies of that day's newspaper. When one group of six boys was asked "How much money did you make yesterday?", three said they made 5 birr, 2 said 2.5 birr and one admitted he'd lost 2 birr:

> "I tried to sell the last copies by lowering the price 50% but did not manage to sell all."

11. Sex workers (girls)

These girls worked as prostitutes on the streets of Addis Ababa, in the bars, near the hotels, by the bus stations and the airport. The circumstances of these two groups were distinctive in several respects. They were an older group than others in the sample, mostly claiming to be about 14 years old. More than half these young people were separated or estranged from their families, and several described themselves as living 'on the street'. Their families had played no part in their decision to get into sex work. Usually family poverty and conflicts at home made them seek a way of making a living. Very often a friend was influential in getting them started:

> "We have to have good clothes... we have to know where to go... we have to deal with customers... we have to learn techniques for defending ourselves... we have to know what men usually demand of a girl - especially what kind of sex foreigners want."

All the money they earn they spend on themselves, on food, clothes, cosmetics and watching videos.

Asked about the problems they face, and the list is seemingly endless, the main problems concern violence and abuse at the hands of their customers.

They manage to find protection by sticking together, or by asking for help from friendly bar owners or a good policeman. But they feel that help is rarely given without strings attached:

> "Some policemen will help, but only if we promise to give them half of what we earned, or for sexual favours."

None of these girls were attending school. All had left during the past few years. They considered their kind of work incompatible with school:

> "It is impossible to both go to school and work as a prostitute. We stay outside late in the evenings and have to sleep during the day. If we want to go to school we have to change our occupation."

Another was more concerned with the social stigma:

> "School and work will not go together because if we go to school as well as work, students and teachers at school will insult us -and abuse us and prevent us from attending."

LOCAL STUDY IV. CENTRAL AMERICA
Guatemala

12. Fireworks makers (girls and boys)

Workshops manufacturing fireworks is a major part of the informal sector within Guatemala. It is carried-out alongside the formal fireworks industry, mainly as small family businesses in rural areas and employing large numbers of children. A poor, rural, mixed ethnic village 50 km from the capital was the site for this study. All the children were attending school (half-day in the mornings), but none were in the grade appropriate for their age. These children described their day in terms of three main areas of work which they had to try to reconcile: domestic chores (especially heavy for the girls) mainly carried out early in the morning, schoolwork which they attend for four hours each morning, and firework-making which they begin in the early morning, when conditions are cooler and there is less risk handling gunpowder, and then work on all afternoon, for about 6 hours.

All these children live with their families. The girls mainly work within the home or in an adjacent hut, without basic safety precautions:

> "I get up at 5 in the morning, from 5 to 7, I make wicks, have breakfast, fix myself up and then go to school."

They continue their work making wicks after school. Earnings for these girls vary greatly. One admitted:

> "I only work. I don't earn anything."

Others were just given pocket money:

> "I only get Q2 on Sundays, with that I buy snacks"

> "When I work alone, I earn Q80 per week... I give it to my father, he only gives me Q10 for myself (Q6 is about US$1). "

One girl felt much more in command of her income:

> "I make Q30 a week... I give Q10 to my mother, Q10 to my father and Q10 is for me."

Most of the group saw firework manufacture as a childhood occupation that they would stop doing as soon as they could leave school. Several had aspirations to leave the village for the capital city:

> "When I finish studying I will go to Guatemala to work, to make tortillas."

By contrast with the group of girls, few of the boys were expected to do domestic chores, and all worked outside their homes, with local employers in small-scale enterprises, and most were paid directly. In the first job they've done, they were usually introduced to the work by a father, uncle, or older brother, who took them along, at first just to watch:

> " Since my brother was working, he took me and showed me everything."

One boy started at the age of nine. After four years he knew every stage of the process:

> "I make the tube for the firecrackers, cut the right length, fill it with gunpowder, fit the wick and braid it to the right shape, then put the firecrackers in the boxes... We know all the work, it is very tiring, we work sitting on benches or boards without a back, our back and hands ache very much. The job of mixing the materials for the gunpowder is done by the owner or other adults because it is so dangerous."

Payment is on piece-work rates, and the boys reckoned to make about Q80-110 per week. They had some choice about how they spent the money:

> "We keep some and the rest we give to our mothers to help with household expenses."

Economic necessity was one factor making work important, but not the only one. Asked if his mother forced him to work, one boy commented:

> "No, she wanted me to work so I wouldn't be lazing around the house, learning bad habits or becoming a thief or gang member."

But another commented:

> "If I stopped working, I would no longer have money and we could not cover our needs."

None of the boys saw a future for themselves working in fireworks. It was a good way of earning money while they were still at school, but once they finished school they would want to look for better things.

13. Lead miners (boys)

Lead mining is carried out in isolated rural communities of Guatemala. The boys who participated in this study live in a village of 300 families about 280 kilometres from Guatemala City and is only accessible after 3 kilometres walking over rugged terrain. There is no electricity in the village. In recent years the mine has been transferred from a private owner to a co-operative formed by 54 local people. It is their families who work the mine including their sons, who are particularly valued because they can squeeze through some of the small holes that give access to the mineral.

While some boys extract the ore, others describe their work on later stages of the process:

> "We take out the metal, we put it in the canoe, ... when it is washed we carry it down from the mine... (and put it in a *Chimbo)...* It is a large metal pot, it has a hole in the top. Into that hole we pour the ore, then we light a fire under it. If there is *Ocote* (torch pine) we put in a piece, then we wait for the *chimbo* to get hot. When the melted metal comes out it falls into iron moulds, and so the bars of lead are formed."

The boys feel that they are supporting their fathers who are partners in the cooperative. Asked 'Who decided you should work?' one boy replied:

"My father, we take out the mineral, he washes it. If we didn't go he would get too tired."

Another replied:

"My mother (decided I should work). I have no father and I must help her".

All these boys were still at half-day school so it is in the afternoons that they work in the mine. They receive a wage of Q40-60, half of which they say they give to their mothers. The other half they keep for themselves, to spend on clothes and shoes. On one point all these boys were clear. While they were happy to help out their families, they had no wish to carry on working in the mine. Three wanted to continue their studies. The other three wanted to make a career in the new commercial sector that had been introduced into the region, partly as an alternative employment to mining.

14. Farm workers - Cardamom (girls and boys)

Participants in the two final focus groups in Guatemala were part of a Mayan community of 300 families, about 235 kilometres from Guatemala City. Labour intensive cash crops of cardamom and coffee are supplemented by subsistence crops (corn, beans, vegetables and fruit). Participants were all living and working with their families, most of whom own the land they cultivate.

Although all these children were in school, none were in the grade corresponding to their ages. Like the girls in broccoli production, school terms did not coincide well with harvest times. They have to stop school a month before the end of the school year, and they can't be released from the fields until 6 weeks after the new year has begun. Even when they are in school, the children complain bitterly about their teachers who are often absent or late for school.

At the time of the study, the children were not attending school. Basically, they followed their parents working day, heading out to pick the cardamom by 7 am and not returning until 5 pm, with only a short break for lunch. This 9 hour work day is even longer for the girls, who are expected to do domestic chores early morning and evening, including grinding corn, making tortillas, cleaning the house, washing dishes etc. Most of the girls were working on their parents' or relatives' land, so they don't receive any wages. Only two work outside the family and receive wages, but they give these wages directly to their parents. These girls had been introduced to their duties from the age of 6, and the same was true for boys. So by the time they are 12 or 13 they are already taking responsibility for cultivating their families' land. Unlike the girls, these boys reported that they do make money, from the produce that they sell. They use the money for fertilizers for their land, or they give it to their families.

Asked about the problems in their work, these young people think mostly about the arduous nature of the work:

"The mosquitoes bite... we are afraid of snakes... sometimes we cut ourselves with machetes... our clothes get torn... Our fingernails hurt... We bleed from

our finger tips.. .The loads are very heavy... We hurt ourselves when we fall or slip with the load."

For both boys and girls, this work is seen as their destiny. Asked why they work, one boy replied:

"Because God said so."

These boys did not see their future beyond the plantations. All agreed:

"We would like to own our own acres of land for cardamom or coffee."

Nicaragua

15. Market workers - porters and vendors (girls and boys)

The two groups of market workers were living in the farming area of Chinandenga, north-west Nicaragua. While the girls were selling vegetables, fruit and *atolillos* (a local drink), the boys worked as porters for stall holders and customers at the market. These young people mostly came from large families living in the poorest district of the town. Most had attended school, but few of the girls were still attending classes and several admitted to being illiterate.

For the boys still in (half-day) school, the working day started at 5 in the morning, when the traders needed their help to set up the stalls. They worked until 11 am, then took lunch and went to school from 1-5 in the afternoon. Once they had completed domestic chores, these boys were free in the evening to play with their friends, mostly football and baseball. These boys reckoned to make about 10 to 20 Cordobas. They generally kept 5 Cordobas for themselves and gave the rest to their mothers. Sometimes these boys admitted to skipping school in order to work. But they knew that their parents would scold them if they found out. By contrast, for two of the girls, parents had encouraged them to leave school to work. Work demands were greater for this group, beginning at home with domestic chores, which had to be completed before leaving for the market at 7 am where they stayed until 5-7 pm at night. They earned a little less than the boys and most of it went to their families. Asked what skills they need for their work, one of the girls suggested:

"... know how to sell tomatoes, and damaged potatoes for resale... haggle over the prices... check the vegetables well... cut the damaged parts off the potatoes... have money to give the change... know how much money each client is going to give, so they don't take you in."

Asked how they got started on this work, both boys and girls said that they were not pushed into it by their parents. Generally, it was older brothers and sisters, or friends who first took them to the market, introduced them to the traders and taught them the simple skills. For example, one girl who now works for a stallholder described how she was first taken to the market by a friend at the age of six, and earned her first money selling tomatoes:

"I took them (the money) to my mom. It was like this. I made up my own mind, that I would work.".

When the boys were asked about the problems of being a porter, they talked

about the heavy loads they have to carry, which had caused hernias amongst their friends. They were happy about their relationship with their customers, but had many complaints about the way they were treated by others in the market:

> "If we try to sell inside a bus, the bus drivers punch us, kick us and pull our hair... Police officers also mistreat us... they hit, kick and chase us."

These young people did not expect their long term work prospects to take them much beyond the market. The boys talked in terms of continuing as porters for another six years, so that they would be able to build up their strength for adult work in the market. Although some girls dreamed of becoming nurses, secretaries or beauticians, they expected to work at the market, as they put it:

> "Until the end of the world."

16. Street workers - shoeshine and vending (girls and boys)

Vending and shoeshine work was the context for two focus groups working on the streets of Bluefields in the South Atlantic Region of Nicaragua. Most were migrants to the city. Some were living with parents or siblings, but others had left their families in the distant region of El Rama in order to try to make their living in the hostile environment of this busy port where crime and drug abuse is a major problem. One boy talked of the family difficulties that drove him to work on the streets:

> "We are nine brothers and sisters in my family. My dad... died in the war... Two years ago, when I left school for the first time, my mom didn't want to love me any more. She only loved the other ones... She bought a lot of things for them... I always had my old T-shirt and my torn shorts, and they had good ones."

Amongst these young people it was the girls who were still attending school (in 4 out of 6 cases). The boys had all quit school, both because school was a bad experience for them, and because work seemed more promising:

> "I had to quit school a year ago... I did not want to study, I was doing badly, I used to get too many 'red ones'."
>
> "I quit because the teacher scolded me too much and she hit me with a ruler."
>
> "I started working with a friend, polishing shoes, then I taught my brother. My friend got the polishing box for me... It was my idea... I noticed you made money... Before that I only attended school."
>
> "My first work was selling. I started when I was 9 years old... I did not want to keep on studying because I did not have money. Before that I used to help my father clean trash."

The girls also emphasized taking their own personal initiative in starting work:

> "I started by myself... because of how things were... the situation of poverty. Before that I used to help ironing."
>
> "I started selling tortillas when I was ten years old. 'Before that I used to help my mom."

Both girls and boys talked about parents that scolded if they didn't earn enough. But the hazards of street work was their main concern. One of the girls reported:

> "Men steal the money from us. They take away our tortillas without paying for them. They are bad, wicked, they never went to school, they didn't get education."

For one of the shoeshine boys, older boys were the greatest threat:

> "Sometimes children who are bigger and go about in gangs... they steal the polishing paste or the money from me."

Neither of these groups saw a long term future in their work. A girl who spent her days selling lollipops looked forward to the day when she would be able to get work as a house-maid, doing domestic work. The boys recognised they needed to go to back to school to improve their prospects.
As one reflected:

> "It cannot be the way it is now, it must be better. You know, when you are little, you think one way... but when you grow up (you realize) you don't even know what is going on."

17. Farm workers (girls and boys)

Agricultural and domestic work was the main activity of two groups of children growing-up in a rural district in the west of Nicaragua. These young people were all living with their families and attended local schools. Most of their work was strongly integrated with their families' farming and market gardening. For the girls, mornings were spent doing domestic chores with their mother:

> "We fetch water. Break and grind flour to make dough for the tortillas. Wash dishes, sweep the patio... help mom wash clothes and do ironing."

These girls' were asked what they felt were the problems in their work. Their replies were closely linked to these daily tasks:

> "... when we fall down carrying water we cry... when the fire doesn't start... when there is no wood... when the wood is green... when we get burnt cooking, toasting corn, making tortillas."

Meanwhile, the boys in the group were mostly helping their fathers in the vegetable gardens. They were equally practical about the problems they faced. They had no complaints about the conditions of their work, only about the way weather and insects could interfere with their tasks: digging, planting, weeding, watering and harvesting.

Both groups went to school in the afternoon, from 1-5 p.m., and then were free to play or do homework. Children in this community took for granted that they worked for their families, and had done so since they were very small. As one girl put it:

> "(I've been working) since I was little, at six. I started with the easiest tasks, fetching water with little bowls. Once you grow up, you start to grind corn."

They didn't see their work as interfering with their schooling, although the seasonal pressures of work meant that they sometimes missed school during harvest times:

> "If you don't work, you don't eat. If you don't study, you don't learn how to read and write your name."

Since their work is integrated with the family economy, these young people do not earn money directly. The boys get experience of trading at harvest time, when they help their fathers sell the crop of between 4-10 quintals of beans.

Although all these children were attending school, their ambitions remained within their community. One boy reflected:

> "I will work here until I am my grandfather's age."

El Salvador

18. Supermarket baggers (boys)

These boys mostly worked in stores in San Salvador. Half of this group of boys organised their work shifts around their half-day schooling, typically working from 3-10 pm. The rest were no longer attending school. They had been introduced to the work through their parents, older siblings or friends. Two boys told how:

> "My classmates told me they're building a supermarket and that's how I went for a job application."

Their main duties were to bag-up the customers shopping, as well as restocking the shelves:

> "(We have to know) where the products go in order to place them on the shelves... be careful with the products because if they fall you have to pay for them... know how to write and sign in order to receive payment... know how to write numbers for the packages."

Several of these boys were worried about being cheated out of their full earnings. They had been promised 300 Colones a month, but payment was often delayed, and one boy had received nothing other than tips for the past two months. With the exception of one boy who spent 50% of his earnings on 'going out with friends and having fun', all the rest said they work to help their families, and it is to their families that they give the money. They saw this work very much as a short term way of earning money. Several had specific aspirations, e.g. to become a computer engineer, a carpenter or a mechanic.

19. Flower sellers (girls)

The flower sellers who participated in the study were working on one of the busiest streets of San Salvador, offering roses to drivers as they stop at the traffic lights. This small group of four girls all live with their families and attend school during the mornings. Their work begins after lunch, when they assist their mothers in preparing roses into bunches. The hazards are obvious:

"It's very hot... We get tired... we have to go from here to there... It is dangerous work, because of the cars... We have to be there during storms... when the light changes, the bus takes you with it or splashes you when it rains."

The hours of their work vary, but one talked about staying out selling until 10:30 in the evening.

"She (my mother) never forced me to do things. I like to help her since I was about twelve. She didn't put me to wash or iron clothes. She only told me 'see how its done, because when you're older you'll be able to do it for your brothers'... I remember I started selling roses on Mother's Day. (Before that) I used to go with my mother to collect the flowers... I like to help her and give all the earnings because she is the one that has to clothe us."

These girls' work is closely integrated into the family's economic activity, and they give all their earnings to their family. They don't have a clear view of their future, but they prefer this work to the alternative, which would be to do domestic chores at home.

20. Farm workers (girls and boys)

Agricultural and domestic work in a rural community was the context for two further focus groups. These groups of boys and girls were all from families who had been forced to abandon their homes during the war. They had spent their early years in a refugee camp in Honduras, before returning to build a new settlement in 1992. They live with parents and many brothers and sisters in very simple one room houses. Their livelihood is mainly based on subsistence agriculture, supplemented by small-scale pig-breeding and the sale of milk. They attend school for half the day. For the girls, the rest of the day was spent doing numerous tasks around the home, very often with major responsibilities while the mother was away.

There is no running water in this community, so one of the first tasks for girls and boys each day is to fetch water from the river. While the girls take charge of the home, the boys join their parents in the fields, caring for animals, growing rice, millet and sesame seeds. Like for the girls, they started this work from an early age. Even at four, they were given the job to carry food to their relatives in the fields.

These young people's view of work problems was mainly about the physical hazards of these daily tasks:

"It is difficult to use the plough. If you are not careful, you can even break your teeth... The animals, cows and goats drag you because they are very strong... The grass itches and when you weed there are lots of thorns... working in the corn field is very tiring, your back hurts... They make you carry very heavy corn."

Asked about the future, all these young people had high aspirations, to become secretaries, teachers, lawyers or doctors. But their realistic view of their future was less optimistic:

"(We will do this work) until we are very very old and can no longer work nor grab the sickle... we will work until we die... until we are stiff."

A participatory approach: Appendix II
The Children's Perspectives Protocol

Introduction and outline

Summary

The Children's Perspectives Protocol comprises semi-structured activities and games focusing on key themes in children's lives. They are used as resources for group work. Many are based around locally-produced picture-cards which participants are asked to compare, sort and rank, yielding a combination of individual and group responses. In brief, the activities are:

Activity 1: '**My Day**' invites young people to describe their daily lives, orally and using drawings and mapping techniques;

Activity 2: '**My Work**' explores the circumstances of children's work and the detail of the activities they undertake;

Activity 3: '**Who matters?**' asks about young people's social networks, the quality of key relationships, as well as their own self-evaluation;

Activity 4: '**Work and school**' asks participants what they consider are the bad as well as the good things about their work, and then repeats the activity for school, before establishing which is their preference;

Activity 5: '**Which work is best?**' asks participants to rank children's occupations (including their own) in terms of relative desirability/undesirability, and explores the criteria on which young people base these judgements;

Activity 6: '**What is a Child?**' examines young people's own views on child development. They are asked to chart a wide range of work activities in terms of age-appropriateness;

Activity 7: '**What if?**' presents young people with common dilemmas facing working children and invites them to comment about what is likely to happen next and what could be done to help;

Activity 8: '**Life-stories**' provides investigators with an opportunity to explore the issues in Activity 1-7 with a particular child, in order to enrich the level of detail provided from group work.

The origins of the protocol

This protocol was constructed as part of the Radda Barnen study Children's perspectives on their working lives. It provided the framework for local investigators carrying out the initial study with 50 groups of working children in diverse occupations in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines and Central America.

- The protocol was designed to inform popular assumptions about the impact of work in children's lives with evidence on children's own perception of their situation;

- The protocol is applied in ways sensitive to the local circumstances of working children, and their preferred ways of communicating their experiences;

- The protocol can be adapted to provide systematic, detailed accounts of specific occupational situations in ways that can inform context-appropriate interventions.

Why study children's perspectives?

Implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a child-centred way must include the perspectives of working children and young people (7-14), whose 'best interests' are to be promoted. Context-appropriate interventions must take account of the way they understand the impact of work in their lives, and provide practical opportunities for their participation. For example:

- In what ways do they feel their work affects their health, their social, emotional, intellectual and moral development - in harmful and beneficial ways? How do they feel their situation can be improved?

- To whom do they feel most accountable in their working lives? How far are their working lives shaped by their parents' expectations? Do they feel any personal autonomy in making choices about their present work, or their future pros
pects?

- What do they believe is in their best interests? How do they feel their situation can best be improved? What kinds of intervention/support would they welcome? How are their views shaped by their economic and family circumstances, and their understanding of the realistic opportunities for education and personal development?

A group approach

The protocol was designed for use with groups of children who share common work experiences. They are normally the same gender, approximate age band, occupation and family circumstances. Through a group approach, children's perspectives are explored through games and discussion which is less threatening than one-to one interviews.

The success of the protocol depends on the preparation and skill of local fieldworkers who convene the groups of children and young people. As part of their preparation it is essential that fieldworkers recognise their own beliefs and prejudices on child work issues. Only when they have 'set these aside' will they be able to listen to the children with 'an open mind'. Spending time establishing rapport with groups is essential if they are to feel confident to talk about their lives. Informal conversations, playing games, sharing a snack, etc. can all help this process, which may take hours or days depending on the group and their circumstances.

The activities were designed as a sequence, but some flexibility is possible over the inclusion and ordering of activities according to the purposes of a local study. It is essential that activities are adapted to local circumstances, literacy levels, children's preferences for talking, drawing, role-playing etc. Local fieldworkers must also pace the activities to take account of children's interest, concentration, fatigue etc., with a balance kept between talk and activity-based aspects of the protocol and regular breaks for exercise, snacks etc. Finally they must keep an accurate record of what the children say and do. Making an audio or video recording can seem a distraction at first, but experience suggests that many groups can feel empowered by the opportunity to record their views, especially if they are invited to participate in the process. These recordings are an important source of detailed evidence about children's perspectives, along with rankings and ratings required for several of the activities. Drawings, mapping, charts and role-play can also be a rich source of information, along with case studies of individual children's history, experiences and aspirations.

As a rule, the more time spent getting to know the children and carrying out the activities the better. How much time is spent with a group will determine the depth of information obtained. As a minimum, allow at least 2 days for carrying out and writing up each group convened.

Planning for group work

A minimum team of two people carry out the group work.

- *A Group Facilitator* takes responsibility for running the groups and introducing the activities. Many are built around picture-cards depicting children in various occupations and circumstances. These must be prepared in advance or drawn with the children. The Facilitator must also prepare materials for drawing, role play etc. It is essential that the Facilitator gets to know the young people well, can talk in their language, is non-threatening and has gained their confidence. There are important issues about how status and identity of the group facilitator will affect the success of the project. Gender especially is an issue - in most settings, girls will not respond to a male facilitator.

- *A Group Recorder* is responsible for observing the groups, noting children's responses to the structured activities, and making and audio (or video) record of the discussion for transcription later. The group recorder must have research

skills, and be able to complete data summaries. Standard data sheets are available to guide recording information. The Recorder most also present to the children in a friendly and non-threatening way. While groups are being run it may be helpful to have a third person available to deal with practical issues such as payment of the children, providing refreshments etc.

Look for a 'neutral' location to convene the groups, some distance from children's work, their school and their families. The location for group work should be quiet, undisturbed and feel familiar, informal and comfortable to the children. The tape recorder microphone should be well-placed to record what is being said. A warm, informal, friendly relationship must be established with the children. The Group Facilitator must not present as an authority-figure. The status differential can be reduced through informal dress, manner, where you sit, how you speak etc. Refreshments should be arranged, and time organised to give variety and fun. If children are getting bored with an activity, abandon it and come back to it later. Pay children for giving up their time - pay a little more than they could expect to earn for the time they give.

Children's consent

The purposes of the group work must be made clear to children and the outcome, including any impact it may have on their work in the case of planned intervention. Children must have given their own informed consent, along with other stakeholders as appropriate. It is essential that research teams also make their own judgement about any risks to children that might follow from group work. They also need to be clear in advance about issues of confidentiality, and where to refer a child if they disclose abuse or require other support.

Further information

This guide offers a brief summary of the activities used in the study of children's perspectives. For further details about the activities, about the collection of systematic information and about the analysis and interpretation of activities, contact the research coordinator: Dr Martin Woodhead, Centre for Human Development and Learning, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, U.K.

Activity 1: 'My Day'

AIMS

- **Find out how children divide-up/describe their day.**
- **Estimate the time they spend on each part of their day.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

1. Create a profile of children's daily life

Base this activity around 'yesterday'. This is more likely to give accurate information, than asking in general terms about a 'typical' day. Ask: *What did you do yesterday?*

Take each part of the day in turn:
What did you do in the morning?
What did you do in the afternoon?
What did you do in the evening?

We are especially interested in:

- The range of activities and pattern of the daily timetable.
- The amount of time given to work, domestic chores, school, play, washing, eating, and sleeping.

Mapping techniques may help children explore their day in space and time. Try to pin-down times of activities so we can estimate hours spent on domestic chores, at work and at school. If children aren't used to 'clock-time', find other markers for their day (sunrise, sunset, school time, meals etc.). In some contexts children may be able to do this as an individual task, which can then be shared. For others it is best done as a group activity, agreed by the group. It can be drawn as a mobility map or children can make a chart /timetable of daily life. This activity could be followed up by more detailed photo-records, diaries or audio-diaries made by children of their daily lives (as part of 'Lifestories' - see below).

2. Talk about the profile:

Discuss how far there is a shared timetable amongst the group. Take note of individual differences. Ask about other days in the week e.g. market days, Sundays. Ask about other seasons if appropriate e.g. harvest time, planting times, festivals. Notice the comments that children are making as they do this task. These will be followed-up later.

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER

Individual and/or group daily timetable chart (especially showing work, school domestic chores and play) including estimates of times. Additional information/ charts to show individual, weekly, seasonal variations. Notes and transcriptions of issues and incidents mentioned by children. Photos, pictures, tapes, diaries (as appropriate).

Activity 2: 'My work'

AIMS

- **Explore more detail about the work that children do.**
- **Explore how they got started, the reasons for working.**
- **Explore their problems, possible solutions and their view of the future.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

This is an open-ended exploration of details of children's working lives - their experiences and feelings. We want to find out about all kinds of work. Where children are involved in more than one category of work, then explore each of these separately. Where children are expected to do domestic chores, explore these too. Use the themes below as a starting point. Use mapping, drawings, flowcharts, role play to support the discussion, as appropriate. Don't dominate the group with your questioning - guide a discussion in which children share experiences and ideas. Start from children's descriptions of their work in Activity 1. Ask children to tell you more - follow the line of their talk. Encourage children to talk about specific events, incidents. Major themes will be:

1. Details about work:

What is their main job?
What other jobs do they do?
Where do they work? Who for?
What skills are involved, how did they learn them?
How much money did they make yesterday?
What happens to the money they make?

2. How you got started:

How did they get into this kind of work?
Did they have a different kind of job before?
Did they have to leave school to be able to work?
Whose idea was it that they should work?
Did they have any choice?
What were the reasons?

3. Problems, solutions and futures

What are the problems they face in their work?
What should be done to make their working lives easier?
Can they do anything themselves to make things easier?
How long do they think they will carry on with this work?
What will they do next?
Who (or what) will decide?

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER

Detailed notes on working lives, stories and incidents shared within group. Verbatim quotes from recordings of key points made by children. Notes of emotions expressed by children, use of 'body-language'. Make a note of issues and incidents to follow-up in life-story work with particular individuals.

Activity 3: Who matters?

AIMS

- **Identify children's social networks.**
- **Explore children's sense of responsibility, especially towards their family.**
- **Explore children's own self-concept/self-esteem in relation to work.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

1. Children's social networks

We are interested in who children see as the important people in their lives - What is their social network? What place do they have within it? Are they dependent - or do others depend on them?

Ask children to make a drawing, or a chart. Suggest they put 'myself' at centre and other important people in a circle around them. They might include a parent, a teacher, a neighbour, a friend, a project worker etc. Use this as a starting-point for discussion:

Why are these people important?
How do they help you?
What responsibilities do you feel to them? How far do they expect obedience? How much autonomy do you have?

2. Family responsibilities and expectations

Ask in more detail about children's relationship to the most important person, usually a parent or parents. We are interested in parental expectations about family, work, school - from the children's point of view. You will need to start with individual children's views and then ask more widely around the group. (This activity can also be followed-up in Activity 8 'Lifestories'). Identify the 'most important person'.

Ask: *What things make them pleased with you?*

Ask: *What things make them cross or unhappy with you?*

Specifically, explore expectations in relation to work as well as school and domestic chores. Explore differences in expectations between fathers, mothers and others?

3. Children's view of themselves.

Ask: What makes you feel good about yourself.? What are you proud of? Ask: What makes you feel bad about yourself? What are you ashamed of?

Explore children's self-esteem, pride and self-confidence.

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER

Chart or charts showing social networks. Lists of parent's positive and negative feelings. Lists of positive and negative aspects of self-concept.

Activity 4: Work and School

AIMS

- **Identify the perceived benefits and problems for working children.**
- **Identify the perceived benefits and problems for schoolchildren.**
- **Assess preferences for work versus school or for combining the two.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

Find out whether children are attending school as well as work. Prepare cards of schoolchildren and children's own occupation. Prepare card of a 'happy' face to represent 'good things' and a 'sad' face to represent 'bad things'.

1. On being a working child.

Place picture of children's own occupation in centre with 'good-happy' card at one side and 'bad-sad' card at the other side.

Ask: *What are the good things about being a working child?* (things that make you happy, pleased, proud, confident) Then ask:
What are the bad things about work? (things that make you sad, frightened, angry, bored)
This procedure can be used to create spidergrams with lists of 'good' things and 'bad' things for the legs. If children have listed many 'good' things and 'bad' things, encourage children to rank these in order of importance.

2. On being a school child.

Use picture for schoolchild. Repeat procedure exactly as for work i.e. Ask: *What are the good things about being a school child?* (things that make you happy, pleased, proud, confident) Then ask: *What are the bad things about being a school child?* (things that make you sad, frightened, angry, bored)

3. Schoolchild or working child.

Put 'school' and 'work' cards side by side.
Ask about present circumstances:
In your present family circumstances, which is best for you?: (i) only going to work (ii) only going to school (iii) going to work and attending school Ask: *Why?*

Discuss the problems of combining school and work. How could school and work be more compatible? If circumstances got better would they want to carry on with work or spend more time at school?

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:

List of 'good' and 'bad' aspects of work with quotes from children. List of 'good' and 'bad' aspects of school with quotes from children. Preferences for 'work', 'school' or 'work and school', and reasons. Audio-recordings and notes of discussion.

Activity 5: Which work is best?

AIMS

- **Identify perceived merit of a range of children's occupations.**
- **Explore reasons/criteria children use when evaluating work.**
- **Make a matrix-ranking of occupations for each of these reasons.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

1. Create an overall ranking for consistency.

Based on pilot work make a set of objects/ photos/pictures to represent 5 major types of working situations that are relevant to children in the age group 7-14, and that children will know about. In most settings, a separate list of boys' and girls' occupations will be needed.

Example Boys' list (Addis Ababa): Shoeshine, Newspaper seller, Car watcher, Taxi-boy, Farmer, Lottery-seller
Example Girls' list (Addis Ababa): Kollo seller, Maid, Waitress, Prostitute, Lottery seller Use a preference ranking technique. Put down the picture of children's own occupation. Then put a picture of one of the other occupations alongside.

Example from girls group in Bangladesh: domestic work.

Example from girls group

Ask children:

1 f you had the choice, would you rather be doing... or 'own occupation'?

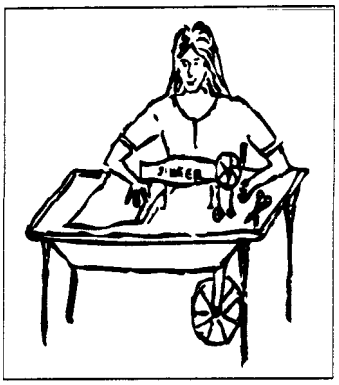
Which is the best kind of job?

Why do you prefer ... rather than...?

Explore good things and bad things about the two occupations. Look for a range of reasons favouring one job over another.

Then repeat procedure, comparing 'own occupation' with each of other types of work. At this point the children should have sorted two piles of cards - 'better than own occupation' and 'worse than own occupation'. Ask children to sort within each of these piles according to which is best. By the end you should be able to lay out the cards in rank order from the best to the worst.

Invite further discussion. If there isn't consensus, note the majority view and the points of disagreement.



Example from girls 'group in Bangladesh: garment worker.

2. Create a ranking matrix

Children will very likely identify different reasons for favouring occupations. One might be more secure, another less hard work and another better paid. Ask children to create a separate ranking for each of these reasons.

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER

Overall ranking of occupations.

Notes and transcriptions of reasons for ranking. Detailed ranking matrix of preferences and reasons.

Activity 6: What is a child?

AIMS

- **Explore children's beliefs about when 'childhood' begins and ends.**
- **Identify what children see as age-appropriate work for girls and boys.**
- **Assess children's knowledge and attitudes to rules/laws on children and work.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

1. Explore words children use for a child, an adult - and the years in between.

Are you a child or an adult? When did you stop being a child? When did you become an adult? What makes an adult different from a child?

Introduce a timeline - a long sheet of paper marked into 5 broad age bands.

I up to 8 years
II 9-11 years
III 12-14 years
IV 15-17 years
V 18 years plus

Relate the discussion to these age bands. Make sure children understand the age bands, by relating to their experience, e.g. of school grades or the ages of members of the group.

2. Make an age-sort of children's tasks at different ages

Prepare a set of 16 cards to show children in a wide range of domestic chores and occupations across the full age range. Make pictures as gender-neutral as possible. Include: 1 of children's own occupations; 5 other occupations normally done by

girls and/or boys (based on Activity 5); 4 other work occupations normally done by older age -groups (e.g. porter, electrician, driver, secretary); 6 domestic chores done by boys and/or girls at various ages (e.g. washing-up, sweeping, collecting fuel, running errands, looking after young siblings, cultivation). Ask them to sort the cards into the age bands on the timeline. Ask them to sort twice - first for their own gender and then for the opposite gender.

Ask: *What is the youngest age you think a girl can do this job?* Ask: *What is the youngest age you think a boy can do this job?*

Discuss the basis for deciding what is appropriate. Note any differences in belief amongst the group. Note reasons given, especially for gender differences.

3. Knowledge about rules and laws

Ask: *What are laws/rules about ages for children who work?* Ask: *What kinds of work is it wrong for children to be doing?*

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER:

Children's definitions of childhood

Developmental chart(s) of age-appropriate work (for girls and boys) Knowledge about rules and laws.

Activity 7: What if?

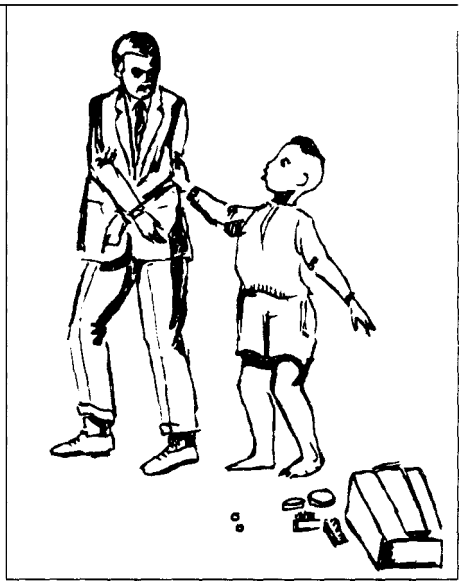
AIMS

* **explore universal themes affecting working children.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

Use a prepared story-completion game (in words and pictures). The themes would be universal but specially adapted to each local context and each occupation group. Ask children to comment on the dilemma in role play, words or pictures.

Ask: *Does this happen to you? What should X do? What will happen next? Why? Who might help?* This is also a powerful way of exploring perceptions of difference, e.g. by varying if X or Y is girl/boy, rich/poor etc.?



Example from Ethiopia: "What if a customer refuses to pay?"

Theme 1: "What if there is no business all day?"

e.g. X has been working in the streets all day but has not had a single customer. X must return home empty-handed.

Theme 2: Breaking rules/trouble with authorities
e.g. X has been working in a place that is not allowed. A policeman chases him/her.
Theme 3: New regulations
e.g. The government wants to make a new rule which says they must be at least 15 years old before they can work.
Theme 4: Family pressures
e.g. X is good at school and his teacher says he/she could pass the exams. But the family want X to leave school so that he/she can earn money working.
Theme 5: Coping with exploitation
e.g. X normally expects Y amount for each job. But a customer only gives half the normal amount.

Example from Ethiopia: "What if you haven't sold anything all day?„

Theme 6: Coping with abuse
e.g. X is working in the evening. A customer tries to sexually abuse him/her.

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER

Summary of beliefs about how working children cope with common dilemmas, what rules apply, what support networks are available to them etc. Transcriptions of audio of key points made by children.

Activity 8. Life-stories

AIMS

* **Make detailed histories of the working experiences of individual children, their perspectives on their present circumstances and future prospects.**

PROCEDURE FOR FACILITATOR

At least one child per occupational group should be selected for detailed case study. Where possible these will be tape recorded in full, and will be a major source of verbatim quotes. Photographs of children's working lives would also be good. These life histories may include interviews with other key people in children's lives, about their views on children's work.

Encourage individual children to tell their story - where they have lived, what are their family circumstances, what school experiences have they had - when did they drop-out of school and why - when did they start to work etc.? What were their responsibilities at different ages? Identify the key stages in children's lives,

and the transition points, as they see it. Try to find reference points that pindown events to particular ages.

Use a flow-chart as a starting point for exploring beliefs and feelings about transitions. Why did things happen? Who decided? Does the child feel they were responsible? Did the child have any choice? Is it what they wanted? Could it have been different? (Explore: compulsion, family, peer, financial difficulties, employer pressures).

Ask children how they would like their working lives to be in 3 years from now - what do they see as their strengths, weaknesses, the opportunities and the threats to achieving their 'dream'.

INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED BY RECORDER

This will require a complete audio-recording, summarised in detail under the main themes of the study and with verbatim quotes from children.

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